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Stretching the Bounds: Lady Jean Skipwith, Mistress of Prestwould, 1748-1826

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STRETCHING THE BOUNDS

LADY JEAN SKIPWITH, MISTRESS OF PRESTWOULD

1748-1826

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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James P. Whittenburg

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DEDICATION

To my parents, all three of them,
who gave me incentive to pull it all together,
and to David,
without whom.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the life of Lady Jean Skipwith, wife of Sir Peyton Skipwith, and to see how her life related to the model woman's of the period from about 1750 to 1825. By using manuscript material such as receipts, letters, parish records, bonds and secondary materials on related subjects, this study investigates Lady Jean's life as a child, single woman, wife, mother, and plantation owner.

Though Lady Jean had been born in Virginia, many years of her life after that time were spent in Scotland. She did not marry until she was forty years old, but she had four children in her marriage, again living in Virginia. She helped in the building of the family estate, Prestwould Plantation, and on her husband's death after seventeen years of marriage she virtually ran Prestwould on her own for twenty-one years. She became a recluse in later life, building up a library that was impressive in content and size and creating a garden that contained a wide variety of flowers, bushes, fruit trees, and vegetables. Upon her death, Lady Jean left to her children a sizeable estate which, through her efforts, had grown after Sir Peyton's death.

Lady Jean Skipwith was a well-educated woman who experienced more independence than was common for that era. She stands out as a formidable lady who put her intelligence to good use and who prospered as a wealthy land-manager in a time of economic depressions. The study of her life points out how far a woman could go in stretching the accepted boundaries without breaking them.

STRETCHING THE BOUNDS

LADY JEAN SKIPWITH, MISTRESS OF PRESTWOULD

1748-1826

INTRODUCTION

The model woman of the Southern gentry in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led a prescribed domestic life of childhood, marriage, child-bearing, catering to her husband, entertaining some religious reflection, running the household, tending sick slaves, visiting other plantations, and perfecting a gentle, even meek, lady-like disposition. She had little formal schooling in classics or even mathematics, was adept at the pianoforte or spinet, knew how to sew and cook well and be a perfect hostess. She was not yet the perfect wife and mother on the pedestal as she would be during the nineteenth century Cult of True Womanhood, but as mother to the first generation of the new Republic, she did assume certain moral obligations. Not yet the fainting belle of the later ante-bellum period, the idea of the passionless woman was not yet strong enough to stifle her sexuality completely.

There were, of course, exceptions to this model woman--Jean Miller Skipwith (1748-1826) certainly did not fit the mold. In some respects, she was totally different from the norm and in other respects she seemed to adhere to the guidelines, but then went beyond into expanded horizons. She was wife, mother, plantation mistress, woman,

but she went about these roles in a manner uniquely her own.

Lady Jean Skipwith was born in Virginia but spent much of her life until almost age forty in England and Scotland. She married late, after her return to Virginia and while not born into the aristocracy, she settled comfortably into her role as Lady Skipwith. Very much in control of her life, she was a capable partner to her husband and mistress to prospering Prestwould Plantation, which she had a noticeable hand in creating. Her life was long and eventful. After sixteen years of marriage and four children, she lived and prospered through twenty-one years of widowhood. She stood out on her own, not merely as wife to an affluent land owner, but as a cultured, intelligent, resourceful woman in her own right, respected if not loved by many. This thesis will show that this strong, out-of-the-ordinary woman met the changing times and used them to her advantage without stepping beyond the limitations. She did not break the bounds so much as stretch them to fit her own tastes and talents.

It is unfortunate that most of Lady Jean's life before her marriage lies in obscurity. Her early years must have had great bearing on her later accomplishments, but there are no first hand accounts of her childhood, learning, or life in Great Britain. What does survive are parish records; Jean's father's will; an account by one of her Bolling cousins which centers on her sister, Ann; a few receipts from the 1770s and 1780s; genealogical notes; a few

letters from other members of her family; and lore passed down through the family--little, actually, to reconstruct almost forty years of life, but enough to build on. A fuller picture, however, can be completed from secondary studies of the period and the woman's role therein. As Lady Skipwith in later life stretched, but did not break, the bounds that existed, it can be assumed that Miss Miller did much the same to a lesser degree. Her later life, including her marriage and widowhood, is much better documented and a clear picture of the Lady emerges. Lady Jean Skipwith, plantation mistress, is not to be overlooked, then or now.

CHAPTER I:

A VIRGINIA GIRLHOOD

Jane Bolling, the daughter of Robert Bolling and Anne Meriwether, was a member of one of the oldest, most prestigious, and wealthiest families of colonial Virginia.[1] Hugh Miller was a wealthy Scottish tobacco merchant and vestryman of Bristol Parish Church. Around 1735, Scottish merchants in Glasgow sent their factors to live in Virginia and buy tobacco at the best advantage. Hugh probably came to Virginia at this time. He helped establish a Mason's Lodge of Scotland chapter in Blandford (now part of Petersburg), Prince George County, Virginia and became its first Master.[2] Jane and Hugh were married sometime shortly before 1742 and made their residence at Greencrofts, a few miles north of Blandford. Their family expanded, starting in 1743 with the birth of their daughter, Ann (Nancy). Robert, Jane (Jean), Lillias and Hugh followed.[3]

Jane Miller, named after her mother, was born on February 21, 1748. She would soon be known only as Jean, a Scottish endearment. A midwife and nurses would almost certainly have attended, with female family members standing

by. A wet nurse may have been chosen though Mrs. Miller probably nursed the baby herself.[4] Baby Jean's birth would not have raised much of a stir in the household, even recording such a birth in the parish records at all was not common, though the fact that her father was an important man in the church made recording likely. Births were an important event in the family's life, but were often given little mention, if any, in letters and diaries. Large families were welcomed, sons especially were advantageous on plantations and in family businesses. Yet the act of birth itself was not often celebrated at this time. Birthdays were also not celebrated.[5] Child mortality was still very high, even among the upper classes. Jane's brother Robert, for example, did not reach adulthood.[6]

Jane would have learned to walk in a standing stool, similar to the modern wheeled walkers for toddlers. She would have been healthier than her European counterpart because of the milk and cereal grains in her diet.[7] There were no set rules on child upbringing. Books or pamphlets on the subject were scarce even in Europe, more so in the colonies.[8] The Millers had some experience already, having had two children before Jean. Hugh Miller would have been absent on business frequently and Jean's mother would have taught the children their early catechisms. American mothers had more interaction with their children than their European counterparts. The time fathers did spend with their children was usually very special.[9] Although it was

sometimes the custom to send children away for fosterage, often with relatives, there is no indication that Jean grew up anywhere other than at Greencrofts.[10] Affection would have been shown, but from an early age Jean would have been taught a strong sense of her obligations to her parents, especially to her father. A child owed both duty and respect to adults. Individualism was not encouraged. Children were subject to close, thorough, and constant parental regulation.[11]

Jean would be schooled in her catechisms and in the rituals of the Episcopalian Church. Religion would have held an important part in her early life. Jean's family may not have attended church often, but religion, in her prayers and in her reading, was a vehicle to teach her moral obligations.[12] A different kind of discipline was used also. The rod was not as commonly employed in the South as in the North, but was not absent either. Foul medicines, such as rhubarb extract, and blood-letting were also common childhood occurences. Frightening, such as the invocation of the spectre of death, or shaming was used to instill obedience and offenders were sometimes put into closets for a while.[13]

Mrs. Miller probably had a strong hand in her daughters' early life. She may have been helped by servants or slaves, but she would have taken on herself the task of beginning her daughters' education. Along with her early catechism, Jean would have learned to read the Bible and other

religious and moralistic books and tracts. Though book-learning was emphasized, the variety of books was limited. Early on, girls such as Jean began to help with household duties. Though most affluent households had slaves to do many of the chores, it was still important for young girls to learn cooking, sewing, spinning, and weaving. Samplers were the best ways of teaching and showing off sewing skills. Gardening or outside work, if any, was usually limited to the sons in the family, though in childhood, labor was not as sharply divided by sex as in later life.[14] Grooming for marriage, the ultimate role of women, started early and did not abate until the goal was attained. While children were not precisely deprived of childhood, their clothes and manners were detailed along adult lines from about age six. Jean would have been made to wear corsets, stays, or backboards to improve her posture and to remind her to stay disciplined.[15] Idleness was shunned. Spare time was used in reflection and reading. Play was not looked upon with favor, but the opinion of it was improving at this time.

Jean had some sort of doll, no doubt, though it may have been hand-made and passed down from or shared by her older sister, Ann. Jean's family may have been wealthy enough to buy an imported doll from England with fashionable clothes and life-like features, but she probably had only one doll, not several. It would have been adult-like, since baby dolls did not appear until much later. Toy tea-sets were

popular and commercially available in shops. These were probably pewter or wooden. China was expensiveand reserved for real dishes. These toys helped little girls play house as was popular to do, though going so far as to play at being pregnant may not have been part of Jean's play as it was for some girls. There was also hop-scotch, leap-frog, blind-man's-bluff and hide-and-seek. Children rolled hoops, flew kites, and blew bubbles. There were even kissing games.[16] Pets were also common. Dogs, cats, and small farm animals were kept, and in rural areas, deer, squirrels and birds such as cardinals and mocking birds.[17]

If Jean was allowed to read books other than religious tracts, there were three major works for children at this time: Pilgrim's Progress (1688), Robinson Crusoe (1714) and Gulliver's Travels (1726). She would also have had access to a primer for her ABCs and perhaps an almanac.[18] Jean had little choice regarding formal education. There were very few free schools in America. Some parishes had their parsons teach to local children, but the wealthier families often sent their children to England to learn, though this practice was on the decline in the mid-eighteenth century. Not only was it expensive, but England was looked upon as too corrupt and unhealthy. Bad habits might be acquired there. Private tutors were common in the South among affluent households, though girls were usually taught only by their mothers. Girls did not receive the same education as boys. Little beyond housework, reading, writing, and

arithmetic was taught to them. There were a few boarding schools and private day and evening schools for girls, but little was taught beyond the three Rs. Music and dancing may have been added. Most girls could play some sort of musical instrument--the spinet, harpsichord, and viol being popular. There were music and dancing instructors who went to private homes to teach. Jean could play the pianoforte in later life and probably started on the spinet or harpsichord in her childhood. Dancing was a serious matter and an important skill for both girls and boys.[19] The gentry relied on balls and socials for match-making, and girls who could dance well were looked on favorably. There were books and pamphlets on etiquette and manners for maturing girls such as A New Academy of Compliments.[20] Yet knowledge of the world, and even the country outside of local points was scarce even for boys. A girl had no need to know anything beyond her duty to her family and skills for marriage. Subjects such as history or classical languages were useless because the girl would have no need for them later in life--she could not go on to university or a career where she could use them. Some fathers, however, were known to encourage a broader education for their daughters.[21] Hugh Miller was described as a "free-thinker" and that may have extended to seeing that his daughters picked up bits of geography and history.[22] He did have strong ties to England, a broader outlook on the world, and may have passed his knowledge onto Ann, Jean, and

Lillias. Jean's adult taste in books did reflect a broader education than was offered to most girls.

Jean's mother died in 1756 at the age of thirty-four. Jean would have felt the loss of her mother keenly as most of her life up to this time would have been spent in her company. Hugh Miller was left with five, (or four if Robert had died by this time), young children, the eldest being only thirteen. Apparently, Hugh had always desired to return to England some day. With the death of his wife, that desire became prominent again.[23] It would seem foolish to uproot young children from family and friends to take them across the Atlantic ocean on a long voyage to resettle, but Hugh seemed determined. He was a tobacco merchant, trading with England and Scotland--he may have felt it was time for a change. He probably was born in Great Britain and had come to the American colonies to make his fortune. That being accomplished, his family ties may have called him back to his homeland. His wife, Jane, was probably the major factor in his remaining in America so long and with her passing the only legitimate reason to stay was gone. Hugh did not move the family immediately. He sold most of the family's belongings and property, Greencrofts being sold to Sir William Skipwith. The rest of the personal belongings went on the ship to Great Britain.[24]

There were ties in Virginia, too. Hugh was a prominent member in his church. In his will he named several friends

in Virginia as guardians for his children on his death. His children also had strong ties, especially to their Bolling cousins. Ann, the eldest Miller daughter, was at the age of courtship and had several suitors already, including her cousin, Robert Bolling, who tried to dissuade her from leaving Virginia. The family did not leave for Scotland until 1760, by which time Jean herself was on the verge of young womanhood. If she had any young prospects they had to be left behind. Her father expected obedience from his children and whatever their own feelings on the move, they deferred to his wishes. The Millers said goodbye to family and friends such as the Skipwiths and Ravenscrofts and set sail for Glasgow in September of 1760.[25]

CHAPTER II:

THE SPINSTER OF EDINBURGH

The Miller family sailed to Glasgow because that city was the major center of the tobacco trade for Virginia and was full of tobacco merchants. The "tobacco-lords" as they were called, were a distinct group, the leaders of Glasgow society. They gave themselves airs of importance, walking down the main streets wearing "long, red robes and bushy wigs", and other people deferred to them, waiting for acknowledgment before speaking to them. Yet many of their families lived in flats with few rooms in many-storied buildings. Unless Hugh Miller had some very wealthy friends or family on the outskirts of the city, he and his children, too, would have occupied a four-room flat. It was not so much a question of wealth, as available space. Glasgow was prospering and improving, but it had not been so long since the city had been a small town among many similar Scottish towns. It had several markets, though not up to the quality of London's or even Edinburgh's. Shops were not well stocked and many goods such as furniture, cloth, and dishes had to be ordered from London. Yet it was a good time to come to Glasgow, however. From about 1760 on to the end of the eighteenth century, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and much of

Scotland was on the way from squalor and backwardness to prosperity and enlightenment.[1]

The change must have been exciting and frightening to the Miller children. Jean was twelve, the age when impressions are very lasting. She had left a locale that was familiar where she had been surrounded by family for a place that was strange. Blandford was prosperous, but still virtually a frontier. There were towns nearby, but things were spread out, buildings low to the ground, of one or two stories. Society was polite, genteel, and slow-paced. Glasgow had to have been a shock. After days of sea-sickness and no land in sight, Jean found herself in a city, crowded and filthy, teeming with loud noises, bustling with color and colorful accents. Cursing was not uncommon even for genteel ladies. And though English would have been prevalent, there would also be bursts of Gaelic.[2]

Where Hugh Miller had planned to settle permanently is not known. He planned to set Ann up in Edinburgh according to Theodorick Bland, Jr. and he wanted his son educated in Edinburgh according to his will. He lists himself as a gentleman of London in his will, but with his strong ties to Scotland he must have also had a household near Glasgow or Edinburgh. London might have been the official location for his business transactions. Many Scotsmen of the time found their fortunes in ties with England proper, not in Scotland and carried out their business in the more prosperous cities such as Liverpool and London.[3] Jean may have lived in

London for part of her life in Great Britain.

If Glasgow had been a shock, then London was a new shock. Where Glasgow was crowded, London was cramped and stuffy. Where Glasgow was bustling, London was booming and brisk. London was made up of numbers of self-contained communities with strict lines of class and occupations. Groups of French Huguenots, Irish, Polish Jews, Dutch, and Germans mingled in the work places. Here there were negros, but not always as slaves. There was sympathy for them and more anonymity in the influx of other immigrants. Londoners were very egocentric, however, and looked down upon foreigners, a reason for the separate communities. There were about 700,000 people in London by 1760 and the mortality rate was starting to decline. There were less squalid and cramped areas of London. The center of London was opening up and there was a migration from the city proper to the newer, outlying districts because of improvement in roads.[4]

Where Hugh Miller had decided to settle did not matter by 1762. He died in February of that year after a period of illness.[5] The move had destroyed his health. Reverse "seasoning" had not taken place. It was fortunate that his will was written in time so that his children, Ann, Jean, Lillias, and Hugh, Jr., were provided for. Anne was about nineteen, Jean fourteen, Lillias between six and thirteen and Hugh under ten. They were orphans, living in a country they must barely have known or have gotten used to. Anne

was old enough to take care of her brother and sisters, but by herself was ill-equipped to manage a household and support it. She would be looking to marry soon. There were relatives in Scotland, mentioned in Hugh Miller's will, with whom the children could have stayed at this time.

The guardians named in Hugh Miller's will were three family members in Virginia, Alexander Bolling, Bolling Stark, and William Stark, two gentlemen friends, possibly business associates, in London and four men from Edinburgh, Galloway and Crawfordsdyke. The will implies that Hugh Miller still had holdings in Virginia as it states that should all of his children die before they come of age, except for certain sums of money to be given to asociates and cousins in England and Scotland, all of "the residue of my Estate" would be divided among his brothers- and sisters-in-law in Virginia.[6]

Hugh, Jr. received the bulk of the estate. Ann received fifty pounds sterling yearly until she turned twenty-one or married. Jean and Lillias received thirty pounds sterling yearly until they turned fifteen when they would receive fifty pounds sterling yearly until they turned twenty-one or married. Each daughter was to recieve one thousand pounds sterling upon her marriage. Consent to marry, the will instructed the guardians, was not to be given, however, until the girls had reached eighteen years (Ann was safe) and Hugh, Jr. had reached twenty-one years. Hugh Miller guided his children even in death. Son Hugh was to go to

school in Edinburgh when he turned ten and was to stay there until he turned twenty-one. No specific provision was made for the daughters' schooling, however the yearly allowances that they recieved were to be applied to their "Maintenance and Education." They may have already been enrolled at boarding schools or have had private tutors. Either way, Hugh wanted his daughters to be well-educated. Girls often completed formal schooling, if any, at age sixteen when they began looking for mates and helping in the house. But even Ann who was eighteen when the will was written was to continue her education.[7]

Education for girls in England and Scotland was not greatly different from that in Virginia. The number of schools was increasing, but most still only taught reading, sewing, and perhaps drawing. More refined schools taught manners, deportment, religion, French, arts, and special graces. Finishing schools in Edinburgh and Dumfries taught singing, dancing, reading, writing, arithmatic and plain needlework. There were also pastry and sewing schools. Yet most women still left school ignorant of geography, history, and grammar. Jean would have been adept at social graces and household management. She would have known how to dance, play the new pianoforte, keep accounts and sew.[8] She was groomed to catch a man of good family and wealth. Ann and Lillias Miller put their educations to that very use. Ann married in 1764 and Lillias married between 1770-1772. Both marriages were to be important in Jean's

life.

Ann was courted by a young man from Virginia who had recently finished his schooling in England. Peyton Skipwith was the son of a plantation family. He was not yet "Sir" as his father, William, was still alive and held that title. Peyton was no stranger to the Miller girls. He had known them in Virginia when they had lived there. Peyton had even courted Ann at that time and there were hints of an attachment which Ann denied to her cousin, Robert Bolling. In 1763, Peyton and Ann were both in Edinburgh and Peyton was quite taken with the young Miss Miller. He was not a very studious person, describing himself as being "of lively disposition" and wrote of "the gay life I had led for twelve months past, without ever giving myself the least time for reflection." A friend of his in Edinburgh at the time, Theoderick Bland, wrote home of Peyton's interests in sports and hunting rather than in study or business. But this was also a typical gentleman's education of the eighteenth century. In any case he pressed his suit and Ann returned with him to Virginia, marrying him in 1764 and living with him on his farm on Hog Island, Surry County, and in Williamsburg. Peyton's father died in 1765 and the new "Sir" and "Lady" began a family.[9] Jean was left with only two close relatives in Scotland.

Jean had some sort of independence. She was not married and her parents were not around to constantly regulate her activity. Whether she lived at a boarding school or with

her father's cousins in Edinburgh, she would not have felt as many constraints as most young women of her age. She was coming of age in a time of much change and turmoil and she lived in the center of that change in Scotland.

In Scotland as well as in England what would become known in the nineteenth century as the "Enlightenment" was fostering new ideas and new ways of life in the eighteenth century. Scotland contributed greatly to this "Age of Reason" with men of idea such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and William Robertson. These men put forth ideas on economics, religion, and education. They were conscious of their Scottish heritage but also of their connection to England. Scotland at this time was without a court of its own, without a center of government to give it a distinct culture in the lowlands. The language was suppressed and the accent hidden. The Scottish writers were trying to out-English the English by cleaning up their idioms and using only accepted grammar and ideas.

Most of the gentry of Scotland lived in the lowlands around Glasgow and Edinburgh. They were almost exclusively Episcopalian in faith, alienated from most of the Scottish people who followed the Church of Scotland or, Presbyterian, church. The Scottish elite had to rely on England for cultural support. They did not forget their differences from the English, however. The English looked down on the Scottish, mostly because of their successes in English trade and occupations, and this strengthened the Scottish people's

pride in their homeland and in their separate cultural heritage. There was a dualism--loyalty to their heritage and loyalty to their king and church. Yet the new ideas on man and God were cross-cultural.[10]

Jean had the opportunity to read Newtonian science in booklets put out especially for women. These booklets and others like them were simplified for "delicate" ladies to read. Magazines such as Ladie's Diary contained math problems, history, and geography. Historical study came into its own at this time as it was one of the most popular topics for authors, writing on English, European, and American histories. Where before women were "nurs'd upon ignorance and vanity" they could now keep up with what the men were learning to a greater extent.[11] Circulating libraries were becoming popular in some neighborhoods and the ladies, especially, used them. One proprietor of such a library commented that the women "know as well what books to choose, and are well acquainted with works of taste and genius as any gentleman in the kingdom."[12]

Jean had access to newspapers and magazines such as the Spectator which brought in outside news and discussed literature and art. Jean could have visited museums which were opening for the public and attended scientific lectures. She could have attended plays. Popular playwrights of this period were writing for the middle-class, the nouveau riche which patronized the arts more and more as their fortunes grew. The plays were

simple, moral and sentimental. There were also masquerades, wax-works, cock-fights, and puppet theaters. Jean was interested in music for her listening and playing pleasure. There were concerts by Handel and Bach and visits by Mozart and Haydn. A love of sacred music was prevalent, though not always for religious reasons.[13] Scots were developing a taste for dressing better, entertaining more and traveling farther as the roads improved. Jean would have tea and dinner parties to attend and formal visits to make. Favorite pastimes in Scottish society were card playing and billiards, the ladies gambling along with the men.[14]

As Jean was enjoying her independence in the social scene, the ideas of the "Enlightenment" strengthened her independence philosophically with ideas of humanistic rationalism, laws of reason, a condemnation of dependency. That humans should be their own persons was the stress of the new philosophers. There was an emphasis on this life, this world, rather than life after death. God was not ignored so much as de-emphasized. He worked by set laws Himself, not by miracles and supernatural events. The Anglican Church was losing its importance in everyday life. Atheistical societies sprang up in Edinburgh. A sense of man controlling his own destiny was developed. The pursuit of pleasure was more respected even by the clergy, which was becoming more secular in outlook. The institution of slavery was denounced--negros were fellow creatures deserving of a free life as much as any man. A sense of

order and regulation was embraced.[15]

Jean did not marry at the age when most young women did. In society of the eighteenth century few women remained single by choice. Whether she had the opportunity to marry or not is not known. She would have finished what schooling she could get by 1769 at the latest. In that year she turned twenty-one and her allowance under her father's will would have run out. She may have been able to save some money to last a little longer or have gotten her guardians to advance her a small sum. Good management skills were one thing she would have learned at school and from her father. Brother Hugh was still at school and younger sister Lillias was also finishing her education. In 1770 a young man from Virginia named John Ravenscroft came to Edinburgh to study medicine. He married Lillias shortly after and their only son, John Stark Ravenscroft, who would later become First Bishop of North Carolina, was born in 1772. In that year the Ravenscrofts purchased a Georgian stone house and estate named Cairnsmoor near the River Cree in Kircudbright County, south-west Scotland. Jean probably moved in with her sister and brother-in-law at this time. Certainly she was there by 1781. It was common for spinsters to move in with their brothers or sisters and to help raise their nieces and nephews. There was a definite closeness between Jean and her nephew, John Stark, as is evident in later letters. This arrangement gave her some sort of financial security, while maintaining her legal

independence. She had a family and a household to help run, yet she wasn't tied to a husband and could still participate in the social life in Edinburgh when she visited Hugh.[16]

Life at Cairnsmoor was busy, too. There was a child to raise and a new household to run. Cairnsmoor was built of stone with a double chimney and slate roof. Stone and slate were plentiful in Scotland and used extensively in the more stately homes of the lowlands. Painted paper for walls was sold in Edinburgh by 1745, though carpeting was not usually available until late in the century. Jean would have watched as her sister created her home and may have helped herself in its development. Mahogany furniture was sold in Edinburgh by 1760. Mahogany was fashionable, especially for dining suites, but still an elite taste. China and delftware were replacing pewter and wood for dishes. Household goods could be bought from peddlers and gypsy tinkers traveled in the country. Markets were plentiful and Edinburgh's could be favorably compared with any in Europe. There were also fairs to liven things up on different local holidays.[17] All of this training came in very handy for Jean when she later helped in the building and furnishing of Prestwould Plantation, though she did not know it at the time. She was in a sense completing her education by practice.

There were probably gardens at Cairnsmoor. Scots were quite adept at gardening and many of the English gentry employed Scottish head gardeners. Gardening ranged from

being small, formal and symmetrical to being more natural and spread out, with personal variations. Most household gardens were still of the plain vegetable variety, but a few enteprising gentry went further--adding fruit trees, bushes, and flowers. A summer house may have been added also. Bulbs and flower seeds became plentiful. Lord Kames' writings on gardening raised it to an art form.[18] Jean, no doubt, picked up much of her later gardening skills at this period. It was one way for a single woman to pass her time. She may have studied botany in the course of her education or reading.

Ladies of lowland Scotland had elegant tastes, but many still preferred the simple life. The home was the center of life for a woman. Ideas of autonomy may have been intriguing, but reality led Jean to a domestic life in the end. She picked up a practical nature from life with her father and from her education and single life. She probably wore little or no cosmetics as most Scottish women did not. She was a maiden aunt with no income. Scottish women were by nature frugal. They were also seen by Englishmen as "charmingly frank and naturel." Earlier visitors to Scotland called the women courteous but bold. The spirit of sports, concerts, dancing, and gaiety which was strong in Edinburgh society would have been seductive to Jean, though as she grew older it was the quiet, domestic life she chose more often.[19]

There is no evidence as to the reasons why Jean did not

marry at this time. It was normal for most women to have married by age thirty, though the number of women who did not marry increased throughout the century. Her sisters were married at the usual age to respectable, wealthy gentlemen. Jean had the same basic education as they did and the same family background and wealth to bring to a marriage. She must have met many eligible men. Her sister, Ann, was described as being not beautiful, but agreeable, with a hautiness and fierceness of countenance which could be made worse by a violence of temper which her good sense kept in balance.[20] Could Jean have been so much more disagreeable? She may have made it clear that she enjoyed her singleness and the independence it brought. She may have been choosy; her education may have been intimidating to most men and her hautiness carried to extremes of snobbery. She would have had a worldly outlook on life and may have embraced ideas of autonomy. She may just not have been looking for a husband, prefering to stay at home and be the maiden aunt. Jean may even have had a desire to return to Virginia some day, a desire thwarted by the increasingly strained relations between the American colonies and England, and one that would almost certainly have come to naught had she married a Scot. By 1784, the atmosphere would have been calmer for travel. In any event, Jean's situation soon was to change.

Jean's brother-in-law, Dr. Ravenscroft, died in 1780. Lillias remarried sometime after 1783. Her second husband,

Patrick Stewart, was a native Scot who took over the running of Cairnsmoor.[21] Either he or Jean or both of them did not like the other, it seems, as Jean made a move soon after. Hugh Miller, Jean's brother, had finished his schooling and was busy working as a merchant, shipping goods to and from America. He had returned to America sometime before March, 1780 and was trading with his brother-in-law, Sir Peyton Skipwith. In 1786 he was in England again, planning to return to Virginia as soon as he had cleared up some business.[22] Jean may have returned with him at that time. She was in Liverpool in early 1786 and they may have embarked from there. As her sister's home was no longer her home, the next logical residence would have been with her brother. By 1786, Jean was living at Elm Hill, a plantation above Lake Ganston owned by Sir Peyton and overseen by Hugh.[23] She was thirty-eight years old, well-educated and set in her ways. But this change in address was only the first of several important changes for Jean.

CHAPTER III:

MISTRESS OF PRESTWOULD

Ann Miller Skipwith died in 1779, one day after giving birth to her fourth child, Peyton, Jr. Her three other children were Lelia (b. 1767), Grey (b. 1771) and Maria (b. 1777).[1] Lelia wrote to her aunt Lillias Ravenscroft of her mother's death in 1781. The lapse in time was probably due to mourning; Lelia was young and the loss of her mother a severe blow. She wrote of " the irreparable loss we have sustained" and "an occasion I must ever regret." She named Ann "the best of Mothers."

Jean Miller's private reaction to her sister's death is unknown. How and when she found out is puzzling as Lelia also wrote in her letter,

> With regard to my other Aunt [Jean], whom I never had the happiness of seeing, he [her father] had heard nothing, and we are all entirely ignorant of her situation.[3]

Sir Peyton had some idea of Jean's whereabouts as there are several receipts for various items for "Miss Miller" through his agents, 1780-1785.[4] The items included shoes, a washstand, and books at various intervals. Most of the receipts are from England or Scotland. He certainly knew when she returned to Virginia as she was living in one of

his properties, Elm Hill. Sir Peyton had been a widower for almost ten years. This was unusual in the light that he was only in his forties and had four children to raise. He had wealth enough to choose whomever he wished for a bride. Yet he waited.

Sir Peyton Skipwith, seventh Baronet, was one of the one-hundred wealthiest men in Virginia by 1786. The "Sir" derives from the title given to his ancestor, Henry Skipwith, by King James II of England. For his staunch loyalty to Charles I, Skipwith was deprived of his estate, Prestwould, in Leicestershire, and his life. His only surviving son, Gray Skipwith, fled to Virginia and carried the title with him. The Skipwith family was, of course, older, having been given lands in England after coming there with William the Conqueror from Normandy.[5] Sir Peyton owned various pieces of property in Halifax, Surry and Mecklenburg Counties, Virginia. In 1787-88 his taxes for those three counties combined listed 6,661 acres of land, 188 cattle, 58 horses, and 144 negroes. Sir Peyton, like many wealthy southern land owners, was a slave owner. He grew tobacco and corn on his lands in great quantities and owned several mills for grinding corn and sawing timber. He sold his crops in America and England through his agent, James Maury. Sir Peyton also had a passion for trading and breeding horses.[6] His activities and wealth typified Virginia gentry in the eighteenth century.

Sir Peyton was ready to marry by 1788 and he set his

attentions on his sister-in-law, Jean Miller. One wonders what sort of courtship took place. Neither party was young. Jean was nearly on forty and Peyton forty-eight. It was not uncommon for older people to court. Many a widow had been wooed in olderage. Yet Jean had not been married before as would have been normal for a woman of her age. Jean must have found it flattering to have the wealthiest man in the area pursuing her. She may even have found it amusing after all of the years of spinsterhood. Sir Peyton must have found her reminiscent of his first wife, Ann. Yet she would have been her own unique person, having spent the last twenty-four years apart from her sister, in a different environment and in different circumstances. She was no blushing young girl, ready to mold herself to fit a husband's demands. She was intelligent, resourceful, and cultured. Perhaps she shared his passion for horses. Whatever it was that caught Sir Peyton's eye, it moved him to propose. Jean was "my dearest Girl" and he asked her to consider that "we are losing time and if you have any regard for my happiness, such a union must take place, and the sooner the better," such a union "on which my future happiness so much and so imediately depends."[7] Sir Peyton was not a patient man when it came to his own happiness. He was not marrying Jean for her money--she was only bringing the marriage one thousand pounds sterling and Sir Peyton was wealthy enough on his own. He needed a mother for his children, but he had waited a long time to act upon this

need. If Jean did not have compatible qualities he could have waited longer. So it was Jean, for herself, that he wanted. He was an ardent suitor. Yet there were complications to their union.

In the eyes of the Episcopalian Church it was taboo for a widowed man to marry a relation of his dead spouse. The ties of blood were considered too close. Yet many people ignored that law. In Virginia, though, the law was upheld rather strictly. Lady Jean was hesitant about marrying against church sentiment. In his letter of proposal, Sir Peyton wrote that he was enclosing a letter from a Reverend Mr. John Cameron to a Mr. Scot which he hoped "will have the weight with You, I wish it to have, and determine you imediately to compleat a Union." He also had letters from "eminent Characters in the Law equally favourable to our purpose."[8] Sir Peyton was powerful enough to obtain dispensations, or at least to have little trouble. Jean accepted his proposal, but the couple decided to get married in Granville County, North Carolina where the law enforcement was more lax.[9]

It was just as well. They received a letter from a friend, R. Hylton, concerning their marriage. He had written a letter to Jean in September of 1788 about the legal problems with their match. He had reason to fear, he wrote, that if they had been married during the session of General Court, "an information would be loosed against you immediately, which might have subjected you both to a

painful situation." He also wrote of Sir Peyton's "impatience for the marriage", the reason for his writing to Jean. He recognized her cooler head and respected that she would do the right thing. Hylton was glad that they went to North Carolina "admitting that the laws there are as favourable as in Pennsylvania."[10] Once they were married, the controversy does not seem to have affected their lives further. No one was going to break marriage bonds already sanctified. Jean Miller had become the new Lady Skipwith.

Jean had been born Jane, but at some point had taken Jean as her legal name. She signed the marriage license as "Jean Miller" and all later legal documents, including her will were signed "Jean Skipwith."

After years of spinsterhood, Jean finally decided to change her status. Even the freer life and legal standing must not have been enough to sustain her through the rest of her life. Under English Common Law, which was in force in Virginia, a married woman did not exist. She was a part of her husband--her property, real and personal, belonged to him. If she stayed single, however, she had control of her possesions. Yet even then she could not transact business without a male surrogate for court and legal proceedings. Jean did not have any property or income to protect, anyway. Being a single woman was not easy. Men and women were more suspicious and occasionally contemptuous of spinsters. Single status to them meant that the single person had an unstable personal life and a dependence on

relatives or friends for economic support. The single woman was violating her "central social responsibilities"--the bearing and raising of children and the managing of the domestic affairs of the family. A spinster was misanthropic. Most spinsters had low social status and had to depend on their brothers for charity, devoting themselves to helping to raise their nieces and nephews. They were seen as suffering from envy and self-pity.[11] Jean had been living with her brother in Virginia and with her sister in Scotland, helping to raise her nephew, John Stark Ravenscroft.

Jean probably became close to her other nieces and nephews, also, when she resettled in Virginia. Lelia was married to George Carter by this time and Grey was in school in England at Eton. Maria, eleven, and Peyton, Jr., nine, had been too young when their real mother died to remember her. Until this time they may have been living with Lelia or with other Skipwith or Bolling kin.[12] Jean may have felt the desire to have children of her own, too. The only legal way to do that would be to marry. This desire to have her own family may have grown over the years. Sir Peyton was wealthy and willing. He admired well-educated women, having already married one. He respected Jean's intelligence and her set ways and give her a comfortable living. Marriage at this point in her life was opportune.

There may have been extenuating circumstances for the marriage, too. The Skipwiths were married at the end of

September, 1788. On July 8, 1789 Lady Jean received a letter from her nephew, John Stark, who was attending William and Mary College. In it he mentions apprehension over "a circumstance, which, however happy it may have made Sir Peyton and your self, yet it has left me apprehensive...." Jean Miller was pregnant, a cause for concern to her nephew because of her age. The letter implies that the event already may have taken place. If that was the case, it is possible that Jean was pregnant at the time of her wedding. Premarital pregnancy was not an uncommon occurance. At the end of the eighteenth century, premarital pregnancy was at its peak.[13] Sir Peyton's impatience for marriage with which he wrote "we are loosing time and...such a union must take place, and the sooner the better" is supportive, if inconclusive, evidence. As there are no definite records of the child's birth, it is impossible to be certain.

It was not unusual for an eighteenth-century woman of Lady Jean's age to bear children. Because Jean did not have any children before this time, there was a medical risk, but absence of birth control made pregnancy difficult to avoid. Her nephew's apprehension was understandable. Jean began her family late in life, but that did not prevent her from having several children. Helen was the first baby, born in 1789. Humberston followed in 1791, Selina in 1793 and Horatio Bronte around 1794 when Jean was forty-six.[14]

It is difficult to say what kind of mother Lady Jean

was. Her nephew, John Stark Ravenscroft, was affectionate with her and this seems to indicate that her part in his upbringing went well. In the letter concerning Lady Jean's pregnancy, it is her health that was uppermost in his thoughts. The child itself will be a "great happiness", but the restoration of her health will be "a vast addition to it." He wrote dutifully to his aunt, discussing his school work and family news. He addressed her as a dutiful son would, only as "My Dearest Aunt" rather than "Mother." He was her "most affectionate Nephew" and even though much of this address is convention, the respect was genuine. There was a strong bond between them. As her link to her family in Scotland, he passed on to her letters he had gotten from home.[15]

There were a few other pieces of information concerning Jean as a mother. She refered to "our little ones" in a note to Sir Peyton, but when Horatio Bronte died in 1805 he was refered to as "his [Sir Peyton's] darling Child our youngest son." He was their son, but the greater affection seems to have come from his father. It may have been grief that kept her from acknowledging her attachment to her son. She may have been trying to maintain some distance from it. One surmises that she was a good mother by the simple fact that it was probably one of the major reasons she had married after so long. She might have had stronger affection for her own children than she had for her step-children. She would have been closer than most

step-mothers because of the close kin ties, but they had known her for only a few years.[16]

In the later eighteenth century, children were often the center of family affection. They were given more freedom and indulgence than was true of their parents' generation. The goal was to "develop the honest, republican virtues of self-reliance and self-control in their children." Children also showed greater affection toward their parents as displays of emotion became accepted and conventional.[17] Affection between husbands and wives also became more open and frequent. Husbands wrote loving letters to their wives when they were away from them. Wives were more reserved in expressing intimate feelings in letters "lest they appear indelicate."[18]

Sir Peyton opened his letters with "My dearest Wife" or "My dearest Jean" and closed them with "I am your truly and affectionate Husband" and "Adieu my dearest Jean and believe me ever yours, affectionately/Peyton Skipwith." Here was more than formal address. Though the phrase "my beloved wife" in a will meant pratically nothing because it was used so often, calling Jean "the object of my sincerest and warmest affection" meant that Sir Peyton had great feeling for her. He also once refered to her as "My Rib" indicating that he could be affectionately playful. In 1790, he wrote that he longed to have her in his arms.[19] Their time apart weighed heavily on him. "I cannot longer bear these separations," he wrote once. He was determined to build a

house for his new family so that they would be together more often.[20] He clearly loved his children and especially Jean and was not content to be off on business with only brief visits home: "but shall come down Saturday night. I wish I could come sooner, but impossible." Sometimes he did make it home early in the week: "I shall try hard to adjust my Business here by Tuesday, or Wednesday evening, and the day following will have in my Arms my dear wife."[21] Jean's letters were more reserved. The only signature that is found on a letter to Sir Peyton was "Yours very Sincerely/Jean Skipwith", hardly a romantic or even affectionate phrase. The few fragments that survive of her letters to Sir Peyton do convey a feeling of warmth and concern for him. In one she mentioned a pair of gloves that she had intended to send to him, but, fearing that they were too small, she had searched high and low for some old ones. She also wrote in one letter of "Sunday, when we hope you will eat a bit roast beef with us."[22] She was trying to get him to spend time with the family, yet was letting him know subtly, not by showing impatience.

The new family was often split between Elm Hill and Sir Peyton's lands twenty-five miles north, known as Prestwould after the family's estate in England. Lady Jean and the children stayed at Elm Hill while Sir Peyton was keeping an eye on the mill and ferry at Prestwould. There was the beginning of a wooden house on this land, perhaps once intended to be expanded into a larger abode and later used

as an office. Sir Peyton stayed here while away from home, but there was not enough room to keep a household there.[23] It only consisted of one room each on two floors with a small hall on both floors. Lady Jean had to stay at Elm Hill and handle the slaves and workmen at the mill and in the fields and run the household. It was not unusual for husbands away on business to entrust their wives with the running of the plantation, and Sir Peyton had every confidence in Lady Jean's abilities.[24] Since he could not be at Elm Hill, he asked her to order the mill workers to come to her and "look and talk them into industry, and if possible the little Gentleman at the Mill into honesty" because he suspected him of mismanaging the tobacco.[25] She was able to command respect from the workers on the farm and to make sure that work was carried out properly. One wonders what a look from Lady Jean would have offered to a person if she meant business. She was no shrinking, delicate lady.

Lady Jean had many duties to perform for any plantation mistress led a very busy life. Her only day of rest was Sunday. Women managed the dairy, the garden, and smokehouse. Candle- and soap-making was her responsibility. There were also children to watch, slaves to attend and animals to be fed. Women were in charge of spinning, weaving, and sewing, if not diredtly, then as overseers of others.[26] As mistress of Elm Hill and later of the house built at Prestwould, Lady Jean helped with many

aspects of plantation life. She payed bills and ordered supplies directly. In a memo to an overseer at Prestwould in 1796 she discussed clothes to be made, a scythe needed for weeds at Elm Hill and cheese to be gotten for herself. She also mentioned some of the slaves that were to carry out these tasks.[27]

Lady Jean rarely made reference to slaves. As a rule, in their private correspondence slave owners never discussed slavery as an institution and rarely mentioned their own slaves. Only in such documents as tax records and wills are they regularly mentioned. Jean had grown up with slavery. Her father had owned several slaves in Virginia and appears to have taken some with him to Great Britain.[28] Some southern women saw slavery as morally wrong, a cruel and unjust curse upon both races. Yet many women were also deeply concerned about slave uprisings and their own vulnerability.[29] Jean appears to have accepted the situation, not being outspoken enough to go against this ingrained way of life.

Lady Jean proved herself a very competent housekeeper and business partner to Sir Peyton when he began building his grand house at Prestwould. The house design, itself, suggests some influence from Lady Jean. By the 1790s, other estates in the area were built in the new federal style, (1780-1820). This style of building was almost square, two-story, with two brick chimneys at one end and a great entrance hall at the other end. It was simpler than earlier

styles of architecture and was often constructed of brick or wooden siding. Prestwould was built in the earlier style, called Georgian. Many later observers have thought that Prestwould was built earlier than it was because of the house's design. It was built from stone quarried on the land and was two-storied with a brick chimney at each end. There were three entranceways, the main one facing the Roanoke River. The house, when completed, looked very much like Cairnsmoor, in Scotland. Both were in the same style and material. Jean may have influenced Sir Peyton to build a home similar to the one where she had spent many happy years during her single life.[30]

A letter from Lady Jean to James Maury, the London agent for the Skipwiths, reveals the large role she played in the transformation of the house into a home. She took charge of ordering carpeting, wall paper, paint, and the various types of hinges, locks, and bells needed for the new home. She was very particular, even adamant, about what she wanted. Her business sense was very visible in this letter. She mentioned articles ordered which were on the invoice enclosed (hinges, etc.) "all of which articles we would have of a very sufficient, good quality." The emphasis was on the "we." Sir Peyton was building the house but she was very involved in its completion. She went on to give instructions for carpeting--Scotch--"of the very best quality, and Neatest Patterns." She wanted order and symmetry, just as in the house façade itself. As far as the

hinges, locks, etc. were concerned, she recommended the agent seek "the advice and assistance of an Upholsterer, or House Carpenter of Character." She insisted that the details be executedwith care and did not trust Maury to accomplish it all on his own. Even the locks on the door and the hinges on the pantry were to be selected by an expert. She also had detailed advice for the expert on inside window shutter hinges:

> N. B. The hinges that are sometimes sent into this Country for Window Shutters, hang them very awkwardly; such as are used for the best finished Brick Houses in Liverpool will suit the house they are wanted for which is stone.

She admitted that she did not know the price of wall paper and would not order any until she had samples and prices to judge. Not just any paper would do. India (Chinese) paper was not an option. "Plain English and Irish" was what she wanted. Her tastes were clear. She was "very partial to papers of only colour, or two at most."[31] She did not wish to be overpowered by the wallpaper. It was to be tasteful, of high quality, but simple. Velvet was excluded for it did not survive well the climate of southern Virginia. She wanted to be comfortable, not flashy.

One might conjecture that Lady Jean was writing with Sir Peyton's guidance, since, as she also wrote, Sir Peyton was "anxious for the arrival of the necessaries to finish <u>his</u> House" (my emphasis), yet she may have invoked his name merely to impress. She clearly had her own guidelines and priorities, and the business sense to know how to handle it

all. The fact that she, rather than Sir Peyton, drafted the letters said much in her favor. He trusted her enough to leave the ordering to her. She knew business. She had already deposited money for the purchases in England "that you may have the money in your hand when you purchase the contents of the invoice; as I am well aware of of the advantage of prompt payment." She knew credit was not always advantageous for getting things done properly. She also knew that insuring the goods was important for shipment results. She did not leave things to chance. If the goods were lost, they were to be reshipped immediately.[32] An important point to note is that the agent, James Maury, wrote directly back to her, not to Sir Peyton. "I have been honored with your much respected Letters...."[33] Lady Jean was clearly recognized as the person in charge. Lady Jean had a strong sense of how her new home should look. The paper samples were not sent until 1796 and new furniture invoices did not begin to arrive until 1799. The furniture ordered included everything from pier glasses, carpets, mahogany chairs and tables, and French Sophy to tent and high post bedsteads, wash stands, a card table, and sideboard.[34] Other furniture came from Elm Hill.

It took some time to build Prestwould. It still stands today. It is a very impressive home with a stately old elm tree in the front yard. Many of the original outbuildings remain in good condition. In Lady Jean's time, there was a smokehouse, a dairy, a washhouse, two fieldhand houses,

several large slave quarters, a large barn, a shed, and a storage house. There was also a formal garden which is recreated to one side of the house. Some of the furniture in the house is from the original assemblage. Much of it is mahogany, dark and sturdy. The original wall-paper chosen by Lady Jean was covered over by a landscape print in Humberston's time. There is a section of her print exposed, however, and one can see the simple, yet elegant taste used in its choosing. The paper is two-toned in cream background with delicate olive green leaves. This paper would not have overpowered the rooms as the present paper does. It would have offset the dark, heavy furniture with a warm, bright cheerfulness. It clearly reflects Lady Jean's taste. The house overall is not ornate or overpowering. It is layed out symmetrically and simply, yet it evokes a sense of power. It implies comfort and gentility.

The Skipwiths had money and taste and used both for their new home. Although the house was secluded (and still is today), Sir Peyton was an important man locally and on the provincial level. Lady Jean had duties as hostess and correspondent of Prestwould. She performed these duties well--several letters point out the respect and admiration held for Lady Jean. The wife of the county sheriff wrote of the deep regard for Lady Jean that would not be removed even if she never heard from her again. Since correspondence was important though slow, this was quite a statement. One neighbor's wife "anticipating an acquaintance desires me to

present her most respectful compliments to you." The woman had never met Lady Jean, but she appreciated her generosity in sending plants from her garden.[35] Most people respected her, though it is difficult to say whether many people had affection for her outside of her family. She was a woman of wealth and power and it was best to be on her good side, especially if one was of a lower social standing.

Jean Field wrote that "a visit from Lady Skipwith is so acceptable that, had I even been engaged...I should certainly have preferred the pleasure of seeing her."[36] While hosting and corresponding with others was an important duty of plantation mistress, she herself may also have made visits to others from time to time. Sundays were more a day for visiting than for prayer and worship. Southern women were isolated on their plantations, tied to them by the daily work to be done. Many "suffered in and from the solitude, rarely able to interconnect with others like themselves."[37] Visits for a woman were usually confined to close female friends, usually married. Jean Field would drop everything for a visit from Lady Jean. She may have been one of Lady Jean's close friends. She was certainly flattered that Lady Jean would take the time to see her. Lady Jean did not get out to visit often, perhaps because she was almost fifty and had born four children after age forty. Her visits were special. The only other reference to her visiting was in a letter from William Munford to Sir Peyton. Munford mentioned being "Honoured by Lady Skipwith"

when she delivered a letter from Sir Peyton personally. Munford was very happy to see Lady Jean at his home, Richland, "after so long an abscence."[38] The new house at Prestwould would have kept her busy.

Because Lady Jean had lived most of her life in Great Britain, she was used to a more urban setting without large expanses of wild land between. There had been no frontier in England and Scotland for centuries. She did not like to travel in the area and preferred to stay at home where it was safe and familiar. There is a curious fragment of a note that verifies this matter. The note referred to a trip to get stone from an unknown place. She wrote, "but the distance scared me."[39] It does not seem likely that she was going herself, but even the thought of it disturbed her. Lady Jean was fine as long as she could remain at her home where she had plenty to do.

Lady Jean did not mind travelling with Sir Peyton, especially if the trip was to New York City. There she would have felt at home in a cosmopolitan setting. The Skipwiths were travelling to New York to enroll their daughters in school. Helen was eleven and Selina was only seven. Whether Sir Peyton wanted his daughters to be educated at school or whether Lady Jean persuaded him to is not known. The fact that she was accompanying him on such a long journey shows that she certainly was interested in making sure that the school would be adequate. Visiting the city would also have been a factor. The Skipwiths wanted

their children to be well-educated, even if it meant sending them north, yet the north was where many of the better girls' schools were found at that time. Sir Peyton was not afraid of educated women.[40]

Some people readily recognized Lady Jean's uniqueness. In one letter, a friend wrote that "Lady Skipwith expresses everything she wishes to communicate with so much care so peculiarly correct, and distinct in all she writes." A friend of Lady Jean's daughter, Helen, later called Lady Jean "incorrigible", implying that she had her own way of doing things and did not mind if it was not the "normal" way. She had built up years of her own thinking uninfluenced by a husband. Lady Jean was also known to have a sharp tongue. She was thrifty in giving out compliments and quick to criticize. In a letter to her friend, Martha Field, she asked, "How does little Mary bear her Nose being put out of joint? For so I believe it is."[41] Lady Jean did not mind whom she offended.

Lady Jean Skipwith was a wife, a mother, and a plantation mistress. She was also a woman with her own hobbies and passions. She was accomplished musically. She could play the guitar and the pianoforte. Her mahogany pianoforte, completed in 1816 in London, was built by the same craftsmen who built Beethoven's pianoforte in 1817. It was a rare make with unique styling on it, which implies that Lady Jean took her music very seriously. She often ordered music or music paper so that she could copy borrowed

music or write her own. One invoice listed music bought for Lady Jean: "Artaxerxes," "Love in a Village," "Bonaparte's March," "Marseillais hymn" and "Martinis Minuet" are included.[42] There was French, Italian, German, and English music. Her eclectic tastes abounded here.

But Lady Jean's greatest accomplishments were in building an impressive library and an extensive garden at Prestwould. Lady Jean began collecting books while she was living in Scotland. The earliest list of books purchased dates from 1781. A list of books that she purchased in Liverpool from 1785-1786 included books on geography, grammar, cooking, ancient history, and theater. Voltaire and Shakespeare, some sermons, letters and the Mirror and Spectator were also listed. The variety of books showed her tastes and her desire for a well-rounded library. When mistakes in her orders were made, she let her agents know about it promptly. They learned to send books for her to check over with the idea that she could send back what she did not want. Even her nephew, John Ravenscroft, sent her books along with news from the family in Britain. Books that she had received in serial form she had bound, no doubt so that there was conformity in how her library looked on the outside.[43]

Lady Jean's library contained such classics as The Arabian Nights, Don Quixote, and Robinson Crusoe. She had novels by popular women writers Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, Jane West, and Jane Porter. She had poetry:

British Poets, Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Alexander Pope, and Hannah More. She had plays: Bell's British Theatre, Capel's Shakespeare, and Sheridan's School for Scandal and his translation of Kotzebue's Pizarro. There were books on the geography and history of Scotland, Spain, India, Switzerland, Greece, North America, England, South America, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. Lady Jean also bought books on botany, medicine, and cooking. She even owned the Encyclopedia Britannica. By the time of her death in 1826, she owned over 384 titles in 850 volumes. Her library was the largest compiled by a woman of her times in Virginia and perhaps even in the South. It rivaled many an important and wealthy gentleman's library. She had books in translation from French and German. She leaned heavily toward literature, with lesser emphasis on geography and travel books, history, and political writings. She was deficient in religious and philosophy books and lacked law and agriculture books. In a gentleman's library, law and agriculture were emphasized, but so were history and politics. Lady Jean also included a good number of children's books in her collection for her sons and daughters who were still young into the nineteenth century. She signed her name in each book to show that it was her property.[44] Many of the books have been found and returned to Prestwould. Snatches of poems and stories are found on scraps of paper in her hand. One was from a book entitled Agnes De-Courci; A Domestic Tale, "volume I, p.

92", that gave a brief scene of the bond between two sisters who "fooled time that was to part them," perhaps echoing her separation from her older sister, Anne. There was also the fragment of a poem in Lady Jean's handwriting. It may have been something she wrote, but was probably copied from somewhere else. Whether she copied it for herself or someone else is not known. There is no citation on it. The fragment reads:

> [With?] sporting, yet fearful to attend
> By humour charms, but never wounds a friend.
> Within my breast contending passions rise
> When this lov'd semblance fascinates my eyes;
> Now pleas'd I mark the painter's skillful lines,
> New joy, because the skill I mark was thine;
> And while I prize the gifts by thee bestow'd,
> My breast proclaims I'm of the giver proud;
> Thus pride and friendship war with equal [strai?]

Both of these fragments are of a romanticized quality.[45] Many of Lady Jean's books are romantic novels. She retained a young outlook on life in her reading and a wordly one influenced by her own travels and education. She did not have had any books in Latin or Greek, but her library still reflects an intelligent collector with a variety of tastes and a broad outlook on life.

Lady Jean started a library, on a smaller scale, of her own garden notes. She had an indexed manuscript volume of shrubs, trees and flowers along with many detailed loose notes. She exchanged her produce with others or sent gifts.[46] There was an orchard at Elm Hill and orchards were laid out at Prestwould as early as 1791. There is a receipt from a Samuel Dedman to Sir Peyton for twenty-two

dollars "in part for my services in building his garden" that was dated 1801. There was a vegetable garden planted next to the barn in 1796, but the impressive gardens recreated at Prestwould today came later.[47]

Lady Jean's notes list her house plants, including oranges, limes, lemons, oleander, geraniums, and chrysanthemums. She noted that she was not always the best plant tender:

> I once had a tolerable collection of annual and other flowers, but the neglect of a few years has lost the greatest part of them, and only the most hardy, and such as would sow themselves now remain.

Lady Jean did have a sense of humor, at least about her own foibles. She liked to use the words "tolerable collection," as with her roses. She was either trying to be modest or she truly had high ambitions for her plants which she had not yet attained. For flowering shrubs she had varieties of roses, lilacs, jasmin, honeysuckle, and mock orange. She even had an extensive wild flower garden with blood root, monkshood, wolfsbane, ladies' slipper, asters, violets, columbine, liverwort, and a plant called Carolina-kidney-bean-tree. She followed garden books by Philip Miller, such as his Gardeners Dictionary (1768). But her own notes were extensive and showed a woman well-educated in gardening and botany. She sometimes even included the Latin name for a plant. She had lists of plants to get "when in my power" and notes on how to raise certain plants and trees such as holly, poplar, mulberry, and cedar. She grafted fruit trees and listed the dates

when the certain fruit trees would be ripe on their property. These trees included several kinds of cherry, peach, pear, plumb, nectarine, and apple. There were also strawberry and raspberry bushes. Here again variety was Lady Jean's forte, with both domestic and foreign types of plants. There were even plans for a garden in her notes, but they are not the garden as planted.[48] The extent of the garden is described in a letter from Selina Skipwith to her brother-in-law, St. George Tucker:

> a spacious, fine garden, to the cultivation of which she [Lady Jean] is totally devoted-if you are fond of gardening of flowers and shrubs, as well as fine vegetables, you would delight to see her garden. She will soon have a fine grove of the orange tribe-as she has many thousands trees that will probably begin to bear at three or four years-her citrons already almost break off the slender branches, and she has had the bananas ripen last year.[49]

The bananas may have been grown in a small conservatory, the foundation of which is to one end of the garden. This structure was strange to Virginia, but was common in Great Britain. She also included a bee-hive in her plans and a summer house to another side of her garden. The summer house reminds one of the necessaries found at many of the more stately homes of the period, such as the ones at the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, only the summer house was made of wood instead of brick.[50] Much of Lady Jean's plan for her garden can be seen as reflective of the innovations used by Scottish garderners at the time she was living in Scotland. The wide variety and number of trees, flowers, and bushes as well as vegetables pointed up the grand style

and seriousness of its owner.

Lady Jean Skipwith was a well-rounded person, which was more common for a younger woman of her station in the early Republic. She had an extra and very special quality. She married for the first time at age forty and then had four children. She gained much respect if not love, even from people who did not know her, and much affection and trust from her husband. She was recognized by others as having her own way of doing things, her own style. She was the main force behind Prestwould's grandeur and stateliness and helped in running its plantation, issuing orders to the men. She built a library and garden to rival those of many great planters. Later, she ran Prestwould virtually on her own for twenty-one years after 1805. In that year Sir Peyton died, leaving her with four minor children, debts to collect and pay, and a huge plantation to run. She rose to the challenge.

CHAPTER IV

THE LADY IN CHARGE

Sir Peyton Skipwith died in December of 1805. His estate was appraised at five hundred thousand dollars, a great sum for that period. He had written his will in August, 1805, shortly before his death. Grey Skipwith, his eldest child by his first marriage, received an estate Sir Peyton had inherited from a cousin in England and the baronetcy. Daughter Lelia, married to St. George Tucker at this time, received slaves that were already in her possession and two thousand dollars. She received no more, wrote Sir Peyton, "because her children are already sufficiently and amply provided for, and there is no probability of her having any family by her present husband." This is curious because Lelia was only in her late thirties while Jean had born him four children while over forty. Peyton, Jr. also recieved slaves already in his possession as well as nine thousand dollars. He was left no more because Sir Peyton had already given him money when he moved to Georgia. He was to give up any claims to Elm Hill. Except for these slaves and money,

> all the rest and residue of my estate whether real personal or mixed and all my lands plantations and slaves, with the stocks of every kind, and all

> waggons carts, carriages and plantation tools of every sort and kind and all and every sum or sums of money which maybe in the house or due and owing to me at the time of my death, and in short whatever property I may die possessed of, I give devise and bequeath to my dearly beloved wife Jean Skipwith....

Lady Jean was to be his sole executrix.[1]

Lady Jean received the estate for life, but was to divide it up upon her death in a will or some other legal document among Helen, Humberston, Selina, and Horatio Bronte, their children. Sir Peyton appointed Lady Jean the quardian of the young Skipwiths. He expressed his trust and confidence in his wife to carry out the complicated process of paying debts and discharging the will. He understood that "it frequently happens that an estate consisting of lands and negroes, becomes inproductive, and difficult to manage in the hands of a widow," so he gave Jean full power to "sell or dispose" of any part of the estate whenever she felt it was "conducive." Sir Peyton wrote of the "well founded confidence I have in her prudent and careful management of my affairs." She was not to be made to pay security to the court for carrying out the will as he was sure of her ability to perform completely and reliably.

Through the turn of the century, the number of wills which named the wife as sole executrix sharply declined. The age of the wife had some bearing, however, and older wives became executrixes more often that young wives did. It was common for older children to have already received a share of the possessions and to be virtually excluded from

the will. The life-estate, as Jean received, was also commonly given to the wife, but the number of wills which allowed the surviving wife to sell the estate and distribute the proceeds doubled from the early eighteenth century to the end. But the size of the estate could affect the terms. A wealthy husband was more likely to leave his widow less power over his wealth then a poor husband. Many believed women could not handle large amounts of money on their own and might lose the family possessions through poor management. The widow was left dependent on her older children or other executors. The difficulty of running an estate became apparent to many wives as creditors rushed in and widows found their deceased husband's capital tied up and little cash available.[2]

Jean had proven herself to be a capable manager already. Sir Peyton gave her the option of selling, but also trusted her to pull through the debts and to survive. She was named the executrix when it was becoming a rare occurance and received guardianship of her children, something that was not guaranteed by law. Jean knew the workings of Prestwould Plantation. She had helped to pay bills, instruct workers and order supplies. She had good management skills learned from her father and Sir Peyton. Though she had the option to sell, she never did break up the estate. In fact, later, she added considerably to it.

A widow had much more prestige than a spinster. Jean was considered her own person again under the law, but did

not carry the stigma of being "single." She had done her duty to mankind and could remain unmarried without losing her social standing. Most widowed plantation mistresses did not remarry, especially if they were past child-bearing years and wealthy. Jean was fifty-seven at the time of Sir Peyton's death. In Revolutionary times, the "reign of widows was absolute."[3] By the early nineteenth century, they were respected if not revered. They lost some of their aura when the fighting was over. Some widows did hold onto their estates and ran them as "women planters." Yet even then they were not legally allowed to handle personal or business affairs in the public sphere. Male members of the family such as fathers, sons, or brothers provided guidance for a woman to prosper as a planter.[4]

Lady Jean had debts to pay and suits against Sir Peyton to settle.[5] One suit from a nephew of Sir Peyton's, Peyton Short, was pending. Jean showed her knack for handling such occurances in a letter written to him. She informed Short of the death of his uncle and identified herself as the executrix, placing her priority as the payment of the legacies to her step-children, implying that anything that stood in the way was a nuisance. Short was suing for a payment of a bond between himself and his uncle. Lady Jean had done some investigation into the matter. "I have been informed you have frequently had it in your power to recover the amount of said Bond. You again, I understand, have it in your power to recover the Money from Mr. Fulwar Skipwith

[Short's great uncle]." She leaned on his sense of "justice and humanity" to not pursue the suit against "the Widow and Orphan" and explained how she had "upwards of $30000" to pay out for various reasons. Lady Jean was very good at subtly getting out of a debt. She played the put-upon widow overwhelmed with her task of money management. Yet her wording and grasp of the situation belied this act. By relying on his sense of justice and humanity--his sense of honor in effect--she was forcing Short to relent. She wrote to him that she was only trying to keep enough money together to survive herself. She kept her sense of gentility and courtesy at the end. She finished with an invitation for Short to visit Prestwould any time he was passing by, as if all would be forgiven since she knew he would not be so heartless as to threaten her in her situation.[6] A letter from Lady Jean's nephew, John Stark Ravenscroft, who was finished at this time with his law studies, showed that she was overwhelmed to some extent. He was disappointed in her anxiety and doubt over money matters where she had "so much strength of mind on all other occasions." Most men would have consoled the woman and expected her to act in this manner. Ravenscroft lightly rebuked Lady Jean for her doubts. He knew she could do what needed to be done. By acting as most women would be expected to act in such situations, she was going against her own personality.[7]

Lady Jean was also overcome, no doubt, by the death of

her youngest child, Horatio Bronte, who had died shortly after his father in October.[8]

The lapse in strength of mind did not last. Lady Jean took over the plantation, running the mills and seeing to their upkeep, buying corn to be ground, supervising the shipment of tobacco and wheat, and sending butter to be sold in Petersburg.[9] Receipts and letters were now addressed to Lady Jean exclusively, usually through her agent, William Cunningham. Great respect was shown for the new head of Prestwould. Her control of the great wealth did not preclude any other behavior. Merchants and agents alike would do everything to make her happy. If sale of her produce was not as good as expected, apologies were made. This occurred more frequently as hostilities in Europe increased in the first two decades of the nineteenth century and embargos were set up. Sometimes, however, the quality of her produce was not up to standard and a good sale was not expected. Butter was rancid or tobacco too old. Yet even in these cases, the merchant would try to sell to best advantage and give Lady Jean credit for better quality. She may have stretched her resources and sent imperfect products knowing that she could get away with it in her position.[10]

The Skipwith family passed down stories about Lady Jean's frugality: "She is credited with having mended the sacks in which grain on the plantation was carried to the mill so often that frequently none of the original bag remained." She was also said to have watched the river

ferries from an upstairs window through a spy-glass to make sure of the cargoes.[11]

Humberston Skipwith reached his majority (age twenty-one) in 1812. He could legally help in the running of Prestwould. Yet, even then, at age sixty-four, Lady Jean retained control. Humberston was doing business of his own in Norfolk. Prestwould was still Lady Jean's domain. Jean was ordering supplies, selling a slave and handling money as late as April of 1826.[12]

Lady Jean also prospered in other ventures--bonds, indentures, and loans. Few women in this period became creditors and those that did usually dealt only with relatives. One had to have money to loan it, too. Lady Jean loaned in amounts from three hundred up to twenty thousand dollars. She was a shrewd businesswoman. When one man asked for a loan for his brother, she agreed--as long as he payed off his own loan first. She knew that his necessity would force him to accept her terms.[13] Most borrowers put up land as collateral. When someone defaulted on their loan, Lady Jean got their land. People that did not even know her asked for loans, trusting that she could comply.[14]

Lady Jean, herself, had to borrow money, but the loans were in small amounts.[15] These loans were made in the first few years after Sir Peyton's death and would have been used to pay immediate debts and bills. Lady Jean kept a supply of money in her desk so that she could make quick

loans and settle bills right away. She would not be caught in an emergency; she was prepared. At the time of her death, there was $926.41 found in her desk, $142.50 of it in gold.[16] She was her own banker in a period when several depressions hit the American economy. This may be why she prospered.

Another commodity that Lady Jean dealt in was land. She rented land from others, no doubt for growing tobacco and wheat.[17] She also bought land. In her will she mentioned six tracts of land that she had bought herself. At least four of them were properties close to if not adjoining Prestwould estate.[18] Lady Jean was not only managing the existing plantation and estate and making it profitable but also increasing its holdings and value. In 1817 her taxes for Mecklenburg included eighty-eight slaves, forty-one horses and 4568 acres of land. In 1820 the taxes included ninety-four slaves, forty-three horses and 4760 acres of land.[19] She also bought at least two tracts of land after 1821. She was afraid to travel alone, but she was certainly not afraid of business endeavors. Lady Jean was a successful businesswoman who kept her records in order. She had some sort of bookkeeping system. On the back of many receipts and invoices can be seen a simplified account written in Lady Jean's distinct handwriting. This was so that she could see the date, amount, and who the account was with at a glance. This also points up the fact that she dealt directly with the transactions and was aware of

Prestwould's business. She may have had an agent to handle outside transactions, but all paperwork was checked by her.[20]

While keeping track of business affairs, Lady Jean did not venture out often. When she was married she did not travel much; as she got older she became more of a recluse, working in her garden and running the plantation. Elizabeth Beverly Kennon wrote to her hoping to "vary the scene a little in your retirement." Lady Jean no longer had a husband with which to make visits. She was also elderly and her children were growing up and getting married. In 1818 she wrote that it had been sometime since she had been out of the house. But she was seventy years old. Lady Jean relied on other people coming to visit her and was disappointed when friends could not visit.[21]

Lady Jean was not living at Prestwould without any family nearby, however. Humberston Skipwith had been away at school for several years. He married soon after completing his studies and lived in Norfolk and later at Elm Hill. Helen Skipwith lived at home after her studies until 1810 when she married Tucker Coles. Helen was a lively girl who loved to go to parties and dances, events that do not seem to have taken place at Prestwould. Selina Skipwith did not marry until 1822, following in her mother's footsteps for a late marriage. She married her brother-in-law, John Coles. Selina apparently was more like her mother than Helen was. Both daughters were intelligent and very dear to

their mother, witness their inheritance. Lady Jean was unhappy with Helen's marriage to Tucker Coles at first. She believed he married Helen for her money, a motive more uncommon at that time than in the eighteenth century.[22] She may have wanted to keep Helen at home with her longer. She certainly was looking out for her daughter's happiness and was watching after the family fortune. Mothers and daughters often developed deep ties. Segregation of sexes within the household sphere was accepted. Daughters learned first and foremost from their mothers. These ties were important, especially to an elderly woman who had few outside contacts.[23] As Lady Jean grew older, she would see friends passing away. Kinship ties would grow stronger as friendships weakened due to age and distance.

Some women, as they grew older, turned to religion as a comfort. At the turn of the century, women were expected to be pious, modest, and resigned to God's will. The Great Awakening had splintered old churches and established new churches. Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches grew in size and the Episcopalian Church was disestablished in the South by the end of the eighteenth century.[24] Jean remained an Episcopalian, albeit a quiet one, to her death. For her funeral, the Church of England service was to be read, but no public service or gathering was to be performed. Her faith was simple. Whether she attended church is not known. Her library shows little interest in purely religious matters. Her books reflected the

humanistic emphasis on this world and man's place in it. This philosophy was becoming increasingly unpopular with the genteel Virginians who looked once again to the next world where comfort and ease would be found. This life was full of hardship and burdens to bear, with "pleasure divested of its pleasing qualities." Death was the end of misery and the beginning of happier times.[25] Lady Jean's will has no indication of this sentiment. There is no evidence of her looking toward the life in heaven rather than the one on earth. She was "fully aware of the uncertainty of life," but at her age, that was not unusual to be aware of.[26] She went about life, working until her last moment. She was not meekly waiting for death to overtake her. She knew it was certain to happen soon, but that knowledge did not make her slow down.

A curious thing to note is that shortly after Lady Jean's husband's death to the time of her own death, there were a number of receipts, bills, court documents, etc. which had her name as "Jane" instead of Jean. Whether this was on the originator's part or her own is not known. She may have acclimated herself to being an American lady rather than a Scottish lady by this time though she still signed her will as "Jean Skipwith."[27]

Lady Jean Skipwith died in 1826 at the advanced age of seventy-eight. The number of women who wrote wills increased through the nineteenth century. Lady Jean had written her will in 1821 with a codicil added in 1824. She

wrote her will because Sir Peyton had trusted her to. She was to legally divide the land between their children on her death. She gave Humberston the whole of the Prestwould estate and forest lands for timber. She also added six tracts of land to her son's share that she had purchased herself. Jean's daughters each received thirty thousand dollars, "over and above what I have already given," to be taken out of bonds. They each received a number of slaves, also. Humberston was to get the rest of the slaves. Lady Jean left her son-in-law, Tucker Coles, a domestic medicine chest and her Encyclopedia Britannica, "as a Small remembrance of me." She appears to have forgiven him for marrying her daughter, though the gesture was not written as being because of her fondness for him. One wonders what his remembrance of his mother-in-law was. Each daughter and Humberston's wife, Sarah Nivison Skipwith, received two hundred of her books. Selina was to receive Lady Jean's carriage and five carriage horses as well. Jean may have hoped that Selina would stay with her at Prestwould and not marry. Selina was in effect receiving a reward for remaining faithful to her mother and staying by her.

Lady Jean provided well for her daughters. Helen's money would have become her husband's property under law, but the medicine desk may have served to remind him of where his bounty came from and to respect Helen enough to let her share in her wealth. Selina would have been able to be comfortable for life and would not have had to depend on her

brother for charity if she had not married. Women's wills often gave daughters more recognition and wealth than men's wills would have. A woman such as Jean who had lived much of her life without an income when she was single wanted to see that her daughter received her fair share. If Humberston died before she did, the land, except for Prestwould which would pass to Peyton, Jr., was to be divided between her two daughters and her two granddaughters, Helen and Sarah Skipwith, children of her son. Lady Jean made sure that the women in her family were not wanting.[28]

Lady Jean left behind no debts of her own. This was a very unusual occurance for anyone. A certain amount of debt was thought to be unavoidable, especially in a time of war, depressions, and embargoes. Her bank in her desk and the money she would have made in interest on money she loaned out would have helped to clear her of debt. Also, her frugalness and cautious good business sense added to her success. Many a plantation owner must have envied her legacy to her family.[29]

Lady Jean saw herself as a private person, refering to the "private manner in which I have lived."[26] Her imprint on Prestwould was recognized by many. Her daughter, Helen Skipwith Coles, welcomed her new sister-in-law, Lelia Robertson, into the family in 1830 "not only as a friend and solace to our only Brother [she was Humberston's second wife, Sarah having passed away]--but as the successor to our

Mother in a home created by herself--and fondly cherished to her latest hour." It must have seemed like a formidable task to Lelia. Lady Jean had ruled well from her home. No other woman had tried to run Prestwould while Lady Jean was still alive. Lady Jean would not have let them.

CONCLUSION

A study of Lady Jean's life leaves a lasting impression of strength and intelligence. The first half of her life lies in obscurity, yet from her later accomplishments it is apparent that she had received a well-rounded education in more than the usual reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlepoint. She could manage a household on her own and transact business as successfully as any man. Her library was impressive in size and content, embracing subjects such as history, politics, geography, and travel, subjects reflecting her own travels and exposure to a cultured society. She had a broader outlook on the world because of her travels and her contact with the great cities of Edinburgh, Liverpool, and possibly London. She had lived in those cities in a time when new philosophies of life and the importance of man were expounded.

Lady Jean was a spinster for many years--her thoughts were her own, uninfluenced by an overprotective father or a patronizing husband. When she finally did marry, she married a man who respected her intelligence and strengths and who knew that she would make a perfect mate--a partner, not an underling. With her new prestige and wealth she created a symbol of English aristocracy in America. Her

taste in simple, practical, yet elegant furnishings and furniture gave Prestwould comfort and warmth, showing off the Skipwith bounty with style. Lady Jean was a lady in every sense of the word. She could be haughty and sharp-tongued, but she also left one aware of her grace, intelligence, and fortitude. She used these latter qualities as a helpmeet to her husband, Sir Peyton, and as a plantation manager on her own, able to command respect from all. When she set her mind to something, as with her library and garden, she used her resources to full advantage. She was Lady Skipwith, not born to the aristocracy, but accepting the role as if she had been.

Taken in pieces, her life may not seem to have been extraordinary or even worthy of notice, but as a whole her accomplishments added up a to a life worth studying for its richness and extremes. Other women were spinsters, married late, were well educated, traveled to the continent and back, married prosperous men or controlled the property on their husband's death, had gardens and libraries--yet Lady Jean put all of these attributes together, combined them in one long life, making Prestwould Plantation a grand home and the Skipwith name a name to remember. Her beginnings were middle class, but she died an aristocrat, recognized as a Lady not only in name, but also in character. She was a formidable example of what a woman could do with her life when given the right resouces--an example of how wrong man of that time was in his assessment of the delicate,

retiring, weak-minded female who must be sheltered from anything too taxing. Fortunately for Jean Miller, she found a husband who respected her talents and intelligence, who allowed her to use them and who did not supress them. If there had been no Sir Peyton Skipwith, she may have remained a spinster until her death, dependent on her family, yet, nevertheless, mistress of her own thoughts and pursuits. And sadly, there would be no lasting proof of her individuality.

APPENDIX A

WILL OF LADY JEAN SKIPWITH

In the Name of God Amen.

I, Jean Skipwith relict of Sir Peyton Skipwith of Prestwould, County of Mecklenburg and State of Virginia--Fully aware of the uncertainty of life, and of what importance it is that I fulfill the trust reposed in me by having at all times a will by me, suited to the situation of my family, and the full powers vested in me, by my deceased husband- Do Constitute and declare this my last Will and Testament as follows-

To my Daughter Helen Coles, I give and bequeath (over and above what I have already given her) Thirty Thousand Dollars in good Bonds- a Negro man known by the name of Mason Dick, his wife Rachel- a Black Smith named Caesar, his wife Ephez; with all their children, and future increase.-

To my Daughter Selina Skipwith I give and bequeath Thirty Thousand Dollars, over and above what I have already given her; my two Daughters making choice alternately to that amount out of such Bonds as I may die possessed of; I also give my said Daughter Selina, a Negro man named Richard a Carpenter, his wife Marcia, a man named Polux, by trade a Mason, his wife Mira, a boy named Anthony, Brother to Polux, with all their children, and future increase.- I also give my Daughter Selina my Carriage and five Carriage Horses, which she can keep, or dispose of as circumstances may render adviseable.- To my Son in Law Tucker Coles, as a Small remembrance of me, I leave my Domestic Medicine Chest (by Maxwell) also the Encyclopedia Britannica, in Twenty Vol. Quarto-

To my Daughters Helen and Selina, and my daughter in Law Sarah Skipwith, I bequeath two hundred Vol. each, to be selected alternately out of the other Books I may die possessed of.-

To my Son Humberston Skipwith, I give and bequeath the whole of the Prestwould Estate, and what is called the Forest Lands, left at my disposal by his deceased Father; together with four tracts of land I have since purchased; Viz, One from Frances and Philip Lockett, on Blue Stone Creek. A Tract of Land formerly belonging to Bozeman Mays- another from Thomas Pinson; and one from the family of Stephen Stone deceased- the last three tracts of land laying

on the South Side of Dan River, the Deeds for which, will be found in my Cabinet- together with all the Negroes, not otherwise disposed of, to him and his heirs forever- The property herein given to my said son being liable for any old claims that may be brought against the Estate- Debts of my Own there are none.-

My children being of age to act for themselves, have not thought it necessary to appoint any Executor to this my last will; but trust they will each receive what is Devised them without any difficulty.- And be it understood, that whatever is not particularly specified in this my will, as being given to others, goes with the estate to my said Son Humberston.-

And it is my desire that my corps may be intered in the same private manner in which I have lived, the funeral service of the Church of England may be read at the interment, but no Sermon or assemblage of people.-
In Witness of the above being my last will and Testament, I have hereunto set my hand, and affixed my seal this first day of February One thousand eight hundred and twenty one.

Jean Skipwith (seal)

In Conformity to what I know was the wish of my Deceased Husband, Viz, that the Estate of Prestwould should descend to his posterity in the male line, I add this as a Codicil to my Will annexed, and bearing date, the first day of February One thousand eight hundred and twenty one-

Therefore be it known and understood that should my Son Humberston Die before me, leaving no Son, that the said Estate of Prestwould (as described in the will of my said Husband) go to the eldest Son of Peyton Skipwith deceased, with one third of the negroes, that may be upon the estate at my Death, and not otherwise devised, and also one third of the cattle, Sheep, Hogs, and Horses, my five Carriage Horses excepted.- And it is further my will and desire, that in the event of the death of my said Son Humberston, as before mentioned, that all and whole of the property I may die possessed of, over and above what is particularly mentioned in this Codicil and annexed will, be divided into four equal parts, and given by lot to my two daughters, Helen and Selina Coles, and my two Grand Daughters, Helen and Sarah Skipwith, the daughters of my son Humberston- which in addition to what they may inherit from their Father, will make their fortunes equal if not superior to that of my own Daughters- In which division is included the six tracts of land I have my self purchased, of the three Locketts and others- The Forest Lands to go with the Prestwould estate, as a supply of Timber.-

And be it understood that the Thirty Thousand Dollars given in the before mentioned Will, to each of my Daughters, is over and above, what I may have occasionally given them or their Husbands in my life time.- In Witness Whereof,

I here unto affix my hand and Seal this Fifth day of May One Thousand eight hundred and Twenty four-

Jean Skipwith

(seal)

APPENDIX B

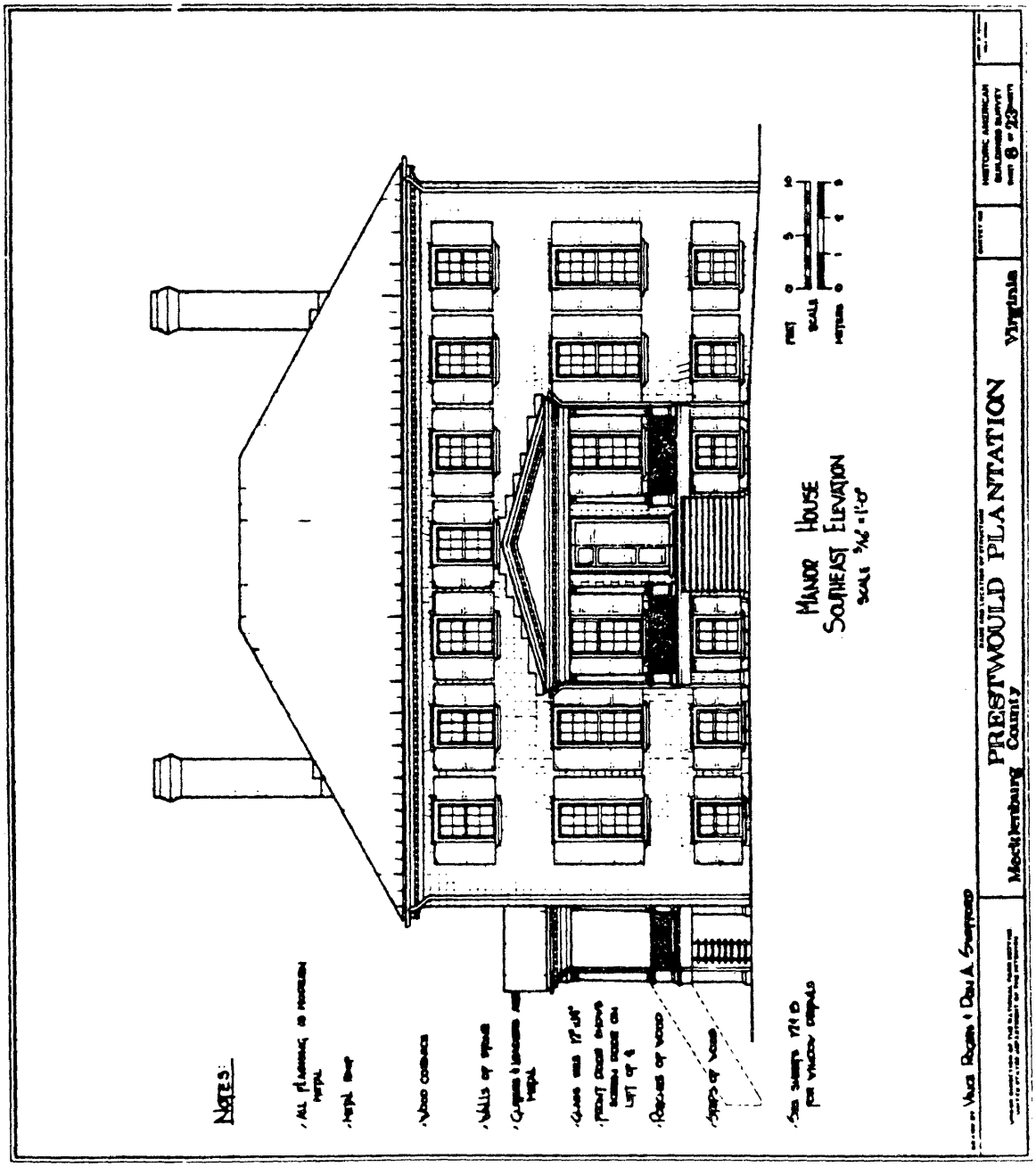
ANALYSIS BY CATEGORIES OF LADY SKIPWITH'S LIBRARY

Titles	No. of Titles Located and Examined	No. of Titles Known Only From Invoices & Other MS Sources	Total
Novels & Tales	143	13	156
Poetry	21	12	33
Drama	6	2	8
Essays	21	6	27
Other	4	0	4
Children's Literature	26	5	31
Travel	26	14	40
History & Biography	29	7	36
Practical Works	7	10	17
Reference	7	6	13
Religion & Philosophy	5	1	6
Unidentified	0	13	13
TOTAL	295	89	384

Source: Mildred Abraham, "The Library of Lady Jean Skipwith," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 91 (1983): 310-11.

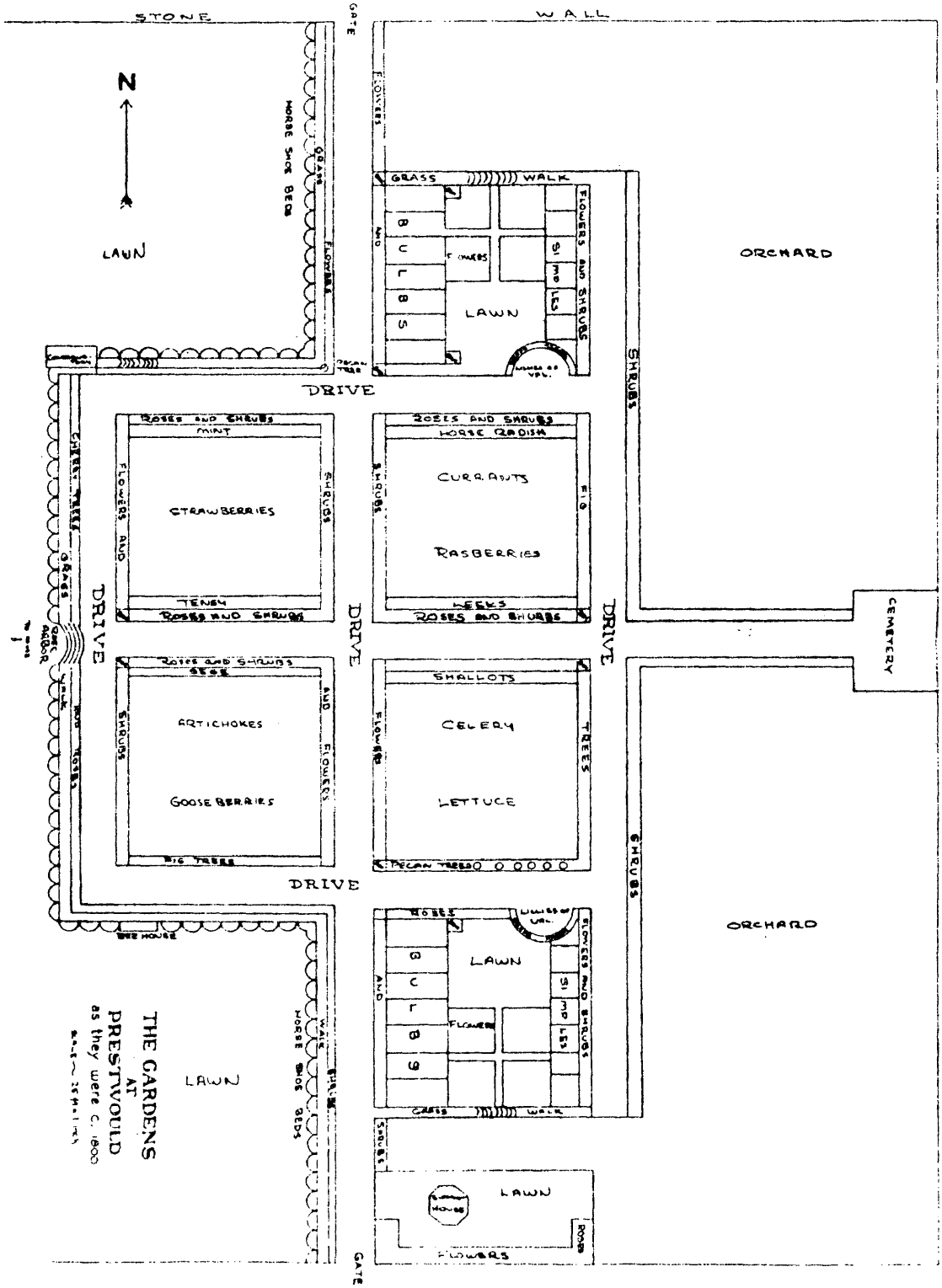
APPENDIX C

PRESTWOULD PLANTATION, MAIN ENTRANCE



APPENDIX D

GARDEN OF LADY JEAN SKIPWITH



NOTES TO CHAPTER I

KEY
SPS = Sir Peyton Skipwith
JM = Jean Miller (until Oct., 1788)
LJS = Lady Jean Skipwith (after Oct., 1788)

*Unless otherwise noted, all primary sources--letters, receipts, bonds, etc.--are found in the Skipwith Family Papers, Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. VHSRi = Skipwith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. VMRi = Skipwith papers, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

[1] Philip Slaughter, A History of Bristol Parish, VA. (Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English, 1879) 141.

[2] Slaughter, p. 83.

[3] Bristol Parish Register; Abraham, p. 297; Anne was born in 1743, Robert in 1745. Lillias and Hugh were born later, but not recorded. Lillias would have been born, therefore, between 1748 and 1756 and Hugh between 1752 and 1756 as in 1761 he was not yet ten according to his father's will.

[4] Willystine Goodsell, A History of Marriage and the Family (New York: Macmillan Co., 1974) 412; Lloyd deMause, ed., The History of Childhood (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974) 353.

[5] deMause, p. 358.

[6] will, Hugh Miller, Dec. 1, 1761. No mention of Robert is made in the will.

[7] Alice Morse Earle, Child Life in Colonial Days (London: Macmillan Co., 1927) 23, 29.

[8] Edmund S. Morgan, Virginians at Home (Williamsburg, Virginia: William Byrd Press, 1952) 6.

[9] deMause, p. 358; Marjorie Plant, The Domestic Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1952) 3; The Scottish especially were very affectionate

with their children.

[10] R. B., "A Circumstancial Account of Certain Transactions relating to what once greatly interested the writer and which terminated at Flower-de-Hundred on the 16 of September 1760," Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library. The author was a cousin of the Miller girls and gave great detail to his account of the thwarted courting of Ann or "Nancy" Miller. The manuscript was supposedly a letter written to his father. The assumption that the writer was Robert Bolling, a poet, is made by Mildred Abraham in her article, note X, p. 297.

[11] deMause, p. 359, 363, 367; Porter, p. 165; Charles Camic, Experience and Enlightenment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 130.

[12] Goodsell, p. 414; Porter, p. 84,85; Earle, p. 230-32.

[13] deMause, p. 369,370; Morgan, p. 7.

[14] Goodsell, p. 417-18; Morgan, p. 13; Earle, p. 305.

[15] Porter, p. 165.

[16] Earle, p. 305; deMause, p. 373; Morgan, p. 19; Jane Carson, Colonial Virginians at Play (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965) 93, 98.

[17] Carson, p. 99,100; Morgan, p. 19.

[18] Earle, p. 228.

[19] Goodsell, p. 420-25; Morgan, p. 8-18; Earle, p. 65,110-11.

[20] Earle, p. 215-22; Goodsell, p. 416.

[21] Morgan, p. 17; Earle, p. 92-3, 213-14; Goodsell, p. 420.

[22] R. B., "A Circumstancial Account...."

[23] "A Circumstancial Account...."

[24] Sterling Anderson, personal interview, April 22, 1987.

[25] "A Circumstancial Account...."

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] Plant, p. 21, 133; Henry Grey Graham, The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Benjamin Blom Inc., 1971) 143; Slaughter, p. 84.

[2] Sterling Andrew int.; Charles Campbell, ed., The Bland Papers: Being a Selection from the Manuscripts of Colonel Theodorick Bland, Jr. of Prince George County, Virginia (Petersburgh: Edmund and Julian C. Ruffin, 1840) note, p. 25.

[3] Janet Adam Smith, "Some Eighteenth Century Idea of Scotland" Scotland in the Age of Improvement, eds. N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1970) 109-10; Porter, p. 50.

[4] Theodorick Bland, Jr. to Theodorick Bland, Sr., Mar. 8, 1761, Bland Papers, p. 19; M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1964) 24,25, 65-73, 110, 111, 133.

[5] Bland, Jr. to Sr., Mar. 8, 1761, Bland Papers, p. 19; "A Circumstancial Account...."

[6] see Chapter I, note 7.

[7] Hugh Miller will, 1761.

[8] Porter, p. 180-81; Plant, p. 13-17.

[9] Elizabeth Coles Langhorne, Jean Skipwith: A Virginia Bluestocking (Clarksville, Virginia: Prestwould Foundation, 1967) 3; "A Circumstancial Account...;" The Bland Papers, note, p. 25.

[10] Smith, p. 108-12; John Clive, "The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance", Scotland in the Age of Improvement, p. 238-39.

[11] Porter, p. 43-4; Camic, p. 73; Porter, p. 39.

[12] Porter, p. 253.

[13] Porter, p. 244-60.

[14] Clive, p. 236; Plant, p. 239-41; Graham, p. 60, 62.

[15] Camic, p. 56-9; 68-73; Porter, p. 244-45, 298-301.

[16] Genealogies of Virginia Families: From the "William and Mary College Quarterly History Magazine." 5 vols. (Baltimore: General Publishing Co., Inc., 1982) 4: 259-60; Anderson int.; For John Stark Ravenscroft letters, see next chapter. Cairnsmoor is still in existence today.

[17] Plant, p. 28, 34-43, 133-36; Graham, p. 57.

[18] Plant, p. 72-4; Smith, p. 110.

[19] Graham, p. 76; Plant, p. 4; Clive, p. 236.

[20] "A Circumstancial Account...."

[21] Genealogies, p. 260; Burke's Geneological and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry (London: Shaw Publishing Co., Ltd., 1937) 2148.

[22] Hugh Miller to SPS, Mar. 7, 1780; Graham, p. 144; Porter, p. 223; Miller to John Temple, Sept. 30, 1786; Smith Hutchinson and Co., to Richard Bate, Apr. 14, 1786, invoice.

[23] JM, list of books purchased, Oct., 1785 to Mar. 1, 1786.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] A Genealogy of the Known Descendents of Robert Carter of Corotoman, compiled and published by Florence Tyler Carlton, (n.p.: the Foundation for Historical Christ Church, Inc., 1982) 14; Abraham, p. 300

[2] Lelia Skipwith to Lillias Ravenscroft, Mar. 16, 1781, (VMRi).

[3] Skipwith to Ravenscroft, Mar. 16, 1781, (VMRi).

[4] Receipts: Jn^{o} Barns to Miss Miller, Dec. 9, 1772; Alex Wylie to Miss Miller, Feb. 9, 1780; Wylie to Miller, Feb. 14, 1781; William Halleday to Miss Miller, Dec. 5, 1781; Alex, Donaldson, Wm. Creech, J. Dickson to Miss Miller, Dec. 21, 1785.

[5] Jackson T. Main, "The One Hundred," William and Mary Quarterly, 3d series, XI (1954) 382-83; Abraham, p. 300; Slaughter, p. 225-26; Gravestone of Sir William Skipwith, Greencrofts, Bland Papers, p. 25, note.

[6] Abraham, p. 300; John Walters Gibbs to SPS, Aug. 28, 1784; Receipt, James Hooper to SPS, Mar.22, 1775; John Meyers and Co. to SPS, Apr. 10, 1784; Thos. Shore to SPS, Aug. 3, 1785; James Maury to SPS, Mar. 25, 1786; Tho. Mutter to SPS, Mar. 20, 1775; Tho. Vaughan to SPS, Jan. 8, 1786; Will Hepburn to SPS, May 15, 1784.

[7] SPS to JM, Sept. 7, 1788.

[8] Catherine Clinton, Plantation Mistress (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 79; SPS to JM, Sept. 7, 1788.

[9] Abraham p. 300; A copy of the marriage license is found at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond dated Sept. 25, 1788.

[10] R. Hylton to SPS, Oct. 12, 1788.

[11] Clinton, p. 78,85; Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth Century Chesapeake Society (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1980) 129.

[12] Genealogy of . . . Robert Carter, p. 14; Grey Skipwith to SPS, July 29, 1785; G. Skipwith to SPS, Dec. 15, 1785. As Sir Peyton attended school until in his twenties, it would seem likely that Grey was still in school by 1788 when he was seventeen.

[13] Smith, p. 139.

[14] Abraham, p. 301.

[15] Abraham, p. 301; John Stark Ravenscroft to LJS, July 8, 1789; Ravenscroft to LJS, Mar. 30, 1789.

[16] Maria died in 1792, Slaughter, p. 227-29.

[17] Smith, p. 40, 42; Jan Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 181, 172.

[18] Clinton, p. 69-70.

[19] SPS to LJS, Sept. 17, 1789; SPS to LJS, Aug. 15, 1790; SPS to LJS, Oct. 6, 1791; SPS to LJS, n.d., fragment.

[20] SPS to LJS, n.d.;SPS to LJS, Oct. 6, 1791;

[21] SPS to LJS, Sept. 17, 1789; SPS to LJS, Aug. 15, 1790.

[22] LJS to SPS, n.d., fragment.

[23] SPS to LJS, Oct. 6, 1791.

[24] Clinton, p. 29-30.

[25] SPS to LJS, Aug. 15, 1791.

[26] Clinton, p. 7, 21-24; Goodsell, p. 423.

[27] SPS to LJS, Nov. 16, 1789; receipt, Edwards and Penny to LJS, Feb. 16, 1796; receipt, Rap and Douglas to LJS, Nov. 23, 1799; LJS to Jo. Hill , Sept. 25, 1796.

[28] Lewis, p. 141; The Bristol Parish records show the birth of negroes belonging to Hugh Miller in the 1740s. Also, his will (1761) mentioned a slave claimed by his daughter, Ann.

[29] Clinton, p. 184, 190, 193.

[30] Susan L. Bracey, Life By the Roaring Roanoke (n.p.: Mecklenburg County Bicentennial Commission, 1977) 187-88.

[31] LJS to J. Maury, Aug. 27, 1795.

[32] see above note.

[33] J. Maury to LJS, Mar. 13, 1796.

[34] see above note; invoice, Kent Luck and Kent to SPS, July 26, 1799; invoice, Samuel White for SPS, Nov. 23, 1799.

[35] Matford Vaughan to LJS, Mar. 16, 1800; Sam Goode to LJS, Apr. 10, 1789.

[36] Jean Field to LJS, n.d.

[37] Smith, p. 41; Clinton, p. 165.

[38] William Munford to SPS, Sept. 16, 1797.

[39] LJS to (?), n.d.

[40] Wade Hampton to Aaron Burr, Oct. 25, 1800. (VMRi)

[41] (?) to LJS, Feb. 26, 1803; Sally Kennon to Ellen Mordecai, Jan. 15, 1807, (VHSRi).

[42] Abraham, p. 299; receipt, Jo. Somervill to LJS, May 25, 1805; Patrick Ogillvy to LJS, Aug. 8, 1805. Lady Jean Skipwith's pianoforte can be seen at the Botetourt Gallery in the Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

[43] Montgomery and Henry to LJS, Jan. 25, 1791; William Prichard to LJS, Dec. 4, 1792; J. S. Ravenscroft to LJS, Mar. 31, 1789; Somervill to LJS, May 25, 1805.

[44] Abraham, p. 263-320. Mildred Abraham has done an extensive study of Lady Jean's library and lists what volumes are known. See table 2.

[45] LJS, n.d., 2 fragments.

[46] Goode to LJS, Apr. 10, 1789.

[47] SPS to LJS, Aug. 15, 1790; Samuel Dedman to SPS, Apr. 24, 1801; SPS, Feb., 1796.

[48] LJS "Garden Notes", Skipwith Family Papers, Swem Library. See illustration 3.

[49] Selina Skipwith to St. George Tucker, Dec. 4, 1805, Tucker-Coles Collection, Swem Library.

[50] "Garden Notes"; Sterling P. Anderson, Jr., "Prestwould and Its Builders", (Clarksville, Virginia: Prestwould Foundation, n.d.) 6. Lady Jean's garden plans were so extensive that they were used in the recreation of the gardens of Colonial Williamsburg.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] LJS to Peyton Short, Dec. 17, 1805; will, SPS, Aug. 3, 1805, copy.

[2] Smith, p. 237041, 345, 77; Suzanne Lebsock, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: Norton, 1984) 36, 38.

[3] Lebsock, p. 26; Catherine Clinton, Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) 78; Goodsell, p. 374.

[4] Clinton, p. 32-5.

[5] William Waller Henning to LJS, 1811; J^{no} Witcham(?) to LJS, Feb. 9, 1711.

[6] LJS to Short, Dec. 17, 1805.

[7] Ravenscroft to LJS, July 6, 1806.

[8] LJS to Short, Dec. 17, 1805.

[9] Tho. Palmer to LJS, receipt Jan. 16, 1807; Geo. Chapman to LJS, receipt Jan. 2, 1806; John Bell to LJS, receipt Apr. 1, 1808; R. Maitland and Christian to William Cunningham, receipt Sept. 29, 1808; Maitland and Christian to W. Cunningham, receipt Nov. 1, 1808.

[10] Andrew Woodrow to LJS, receipt Jan. 25, 1808; Bell to LJS, receipt Apr. 1, 1808; Maitland and Christian, receipt July 3, 1809; Maitland and Christian, receipt Nov. 1, 1808; William Potts and Co., to LJS, Mar. 25, 1809.

[11] Anderson, p. 7.

[12] Abraham DeRevere to Humberston Skipwith, July 15, 1819; Neilsons and Neale to H. Skipwith, Nov. 8, 1819; LJS to William Wall, Mar. 4, 1826; Jo. Buford to LJS, Mar. 31, 1826; William Bowie Cowan to James Cunningham, Apr. 30, 1826.

[13] LJS, J. Cunningham, and Matthew Baptist, indenture Mar. 26, 1821; Buford with LJS, bond Dec. 17, 1823; J. Cunningham to Buford, Oct. 5, 1824.

[14] Philip and Francis Lockett had two bonds in 1826 from LJS at $525.00 each (Oct. 8, 1806). In her will she mentions land she "bought" from the brothers; J. Cunningham to Buford, Oct. 5, 1824; A. G. Keen to LJS, Apr. 5, 1821; Cowan to LJS, Apr. 30, 1826.

[15] Robert Marshall to LJS, loan Aug. 8, 1824 ($220.00); Marshall to LJS, loan Jan. 22, 1809; Colonel W. Gill to LJS, loan Apr. 8, 1809.

[16] receipt n.d. "at time of death" (VHSRi); Lewis, p. 137.

[17] LJS to Joseph B. Clausel, 1807; Geo. Barnes (guardian) to W. Cunningham, receipt Jan. 6, 1809. She rented this land annually through 1821. Last receipt Abner Lockett (owner) to LJS, Dec. 17, 1821.

[18] will, LJS, Feb. 1, 1821, codicil, May 5, 1824.

[19] LJS to Sheriff of Mecklenburg, Aug 18, 1817; LJS to Sheriff of Meck., 1820.

[20] see various receipts, 1810-1826, Skipwith Family Papers, Special Collections, Swem Library.

[21] Elizabeth Beverly Kennon to LJS, Jan. 9, 1810 (VHSRi); LJS to Martha Field, n.d. (VHSRi).

[22] S. Kennon to Mordecai, Jan. 5, 1807, (VHSRi); Langhorne, Bluestocking, p. 9.

[23] Smith, p. 59, 61.

[24] Lewis, p. 47-50.

[25] will, LJS, 1826; table 2 see per cent of religious books; Lewis, p. 52, 68, 65, 63.

[26] will, LJS.

[27] Maitland and Christian to W. Cunningham, Sept. 29, 1808; J. Cunningham to O'Goode, Dec. 23, 1809; Sheriff of Mecklenburg, receipt Aug. 1811; William Baskervill, receipt 1812; A. B. Puryear to LJS, June 21, 1816; Burwell and Moody to LJS, Aug. 16, 1822.

[28] will, LJS.

[29] will, LJS; Lewis, p. 110.

[30] will, LJS.

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